

Makers of Indian Literature

Bidyut Prabha Devi

Bijaya Kumar Nanda

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Sahitya Akademi

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Preface

Bidyut Prabha is one of the most acclaimed Oriya women poets of modern Orissa. She was a kind, gentle, sociable and sensitive spirit, full of loving concern for humanity. She was a true poet in the best sense of the term. Her life was tragic. She suffered from serious ailments and died a premature death. But her genius combined with her perseverance to create a body of poetry that is varied, instructive, musical and scintillating. Being a critical traditionalist, she wrote poems that have no overt ideological underpinnings. Rather, these poems show a delicate feminine consciousness always at work. Her poetry gave expression to a variety of moods and sentiments in musical verses and in felicitous and evocative language.

Within the limited space of this monograph, an attempt has been made to capture the variety and largeness of Bidyut Prabha's life, vision and works. The details of her personal life that had a bearing upon her literary career have been highlighted. Of course, it is an uphill task to document all the significant aspects of her character, temperament and milieu as well as her activities and experiences. While making a critical assessment of her works, I have restrained myself from engaging in the plethora of literary theories and criticism prevailing in the post modern age. Rather, I have tried to focus on the distinctive idiom, experience and trends of Bidyut Prabha's writings by way of analysis, interpretation and evaluation. Bidyut Prabha's corpus of writings is so much prolific and so much varied that a proper and just assessment of her works would require a very large space, which is not affordable here. Hence, I have confined myself to the critical evaluation of the major themes and modes of her works, not in an overly critical manner, to acquaint the readers with the nature and form of her works.

This study will provide the readers with a short but intimate account of Bidyut Prabha, the person and the writer, who happens to be one of the makers of Indian literature. I hope it will satisfy the readers' curiosity and interest and their reading of the text will be a meaningful experience.

Bijaya Kumar Nanda

Life and Times

Bidyut Prabha Devi was born on 12th July 1926 at her maternal uncle's house in a small village named Jhinkadi in the district of Cuttack. She was the second daughter of Nimai Charan Das, a well-known writer and compiler, and Rekha Devi. Her parents lived in Bamphisahi of Cuttack city. They were not wealthy people. Although Nimai had some landed property in his village, Natra, he did not earn much from that property because of enmity and non-cooperation of relatives and other family members. He didn't like to enter into litigation for getting his due. For sometime he had taken up a job but soon he left it and adopted the profession of a writer. He had literary talent, a good command over English language and he very well knew the art of teaching. He wrote books in English for the students of M.E. schools and High schools, published and sold the same to students moving from one educational institution to another. He endeared himself to people with his gentle behaviour and sweet conversation. This active man, an workaholic, brought financial stability to his family through struggle and perseverance.

Nimai's wife, Rekha Devi had strength of character. She was very humble and dedicated to duty just like her husband. There was cooperation and undserstanding between the two. Bidyut Prabha imbibed the qualities of her parents. She learnt to be humble and sweet and developed the spirit of acceptance. Such qualities later moulded her personality and poetic self.

Nimai and his wife were both traditionalists and conservatives. Their conservative attitude grew under the pressure of circumstances. They knew how the society becomes harsh and cruel towards parents having daughters. Hence the couple was careful in keeping their three daughters under strict restriction and close watchfulness. However, they didn't neglect their daughters. Though not very well-off they were eager to bring them up properly and give them proper education. Nimai had a fairly ambivalent attitude towards female education.

Bidyut Prabha had a brother and two sisters. She was the brightest among the children. From her very childhood it was

revealed that she was an intelligent girl with great potentialities. She was very curious to know things and asked intelligent questions about serious matters. Nimai was much surprised to see her daughter, at a tender age, reading poetry rapturously and reciting poems faultlessly with proper lilt and rhythm in a melodious voice. The little girl seemed to be overwhelmed with joy whenever she got a good book of poems to read.

Bidyut Prabha was her father's little darling. Both the father and the daughter shared their feelings with each other. Nimai used to talk and discuss different things with this favourite daughter. It seemed their relationship was not merely one of love and affection usually existing between a father and a daughter but it was also an intellectual relationship.

Bidyut Prabha grew up in the city of Cuttack. The atmosphere in a city is somewhat liberal and free from the extremely conservative outlook of life prevailing in the countryside. From her girlhood days Bidyut Prabha was free from fear and shyness. She used to spend her leisure time with her friends having lots of fun and frolic. She joined Ravenshaw Girls' School and studied there. She had to leave her studies while she was a student of class IX at the behest of her father.

In class VIII Bidyut Prabha entered into adolescence leaving behind her childhood. She had all the dreams and ambitions, hopes and aspirations, fantasies and excitements of an adolescent girl. She derived great pleasure and inspiration from study and was thinking of becoming somebody in future. This girl was thoroughly disillusioned and full of agony when her study came to an end.

A significant factor that militated against female education and creativity in Orissa was the 'Conduct Book', tradition represented by 'Advice for Women' texts. 'Conduct Books' by writers like Jagabandhu Singh created and promoted a discourse, which advanced a male-oriented agenda. It often took recourse to intelligent and skillful means for pushing an ideology of female containment. It aimed at propagating the ideal of the good housewife. The heroic women of India, the great Ramani of Bharata, would give birth to noble souls. A woman has to cook and take care of the health of the family members. She has no use of make-up when the husband is away. For a woman her husband is truly the source of joy and fulfillment.

Nimai and his wife were guided partly by this tradition. But they were also aware of the potentialities of their daughter and her ambitions. Their daughter was full of enthusiasm and emotion. Though she wanted freedom to fly like a bird she was not rude or reckless. Her mind was not inclined towards evil desires and deeds. Still Nimai became worried about his daughter. He was thinking that by the time she went into a college she would grow into a young woman. There she would mingle with male students and participate in different academic and cultural activities of the college. This thought made him apprehensive that he might have to face several difficulties and crises in marrying off his daughter. Moreover he was also concerned about the amount of dowry he would have to pay to the would-be husband of his daughter if she became highly educated and married a man of the same educational status.

Bidyut Prabha knew that her parents were conservative but she had the hope and belief that Nimai would pay respect to and give importance to her ambitions of life. She didn't expect that her desire for higher studies would be nipped in the bud. For sometime the natural gaiety and excitement of her heart disappeared.

Bidyut Prabha went to Natra, her parental village. It was far away from Cuttack city. Its environment and life-style were totally different from those of Cuttack. It was a low-lying area, always prone to flood and totally inaccessible during the periods of flood. Modern amenities were not available. Moreover, village life there was guided by strict rules of moral conduct. But it had its natural beauty and rustic simplicity and charm as well.

The village, Natra was situated near the river Kani, a distributary of the river Kharasrota. During rainy season the village and its adjoining areas were converted into a sea of floodwater. Floodwater would sweep through the streets and people would have to travel by ferry. At night the hissing wind, the splattering rain and the roaring floodwater would create a strange fear in one's heart.

But after a few days the scenes would change. The receding floodwater would deposit enough silt on the land and make it fertile. If the paddy crop failed in the rainy season, people would reap a rich harvest of *Rabi* crops in winter. They would be

overjoyed to see the beautiful green waves of crop in their fields. Summer would be charming. The bright rays of the sun would create the illusion of mirage over the marshy lands during the quiet, hot noon. Bidyut Prabha was greatly enamoured by the natural beauty of her village and absorbed into her being the variegated environments of nature with extraordinary sensitivity and thoroughness. All this had a tremendous impact on her writings.

Another great attraction for her in the village was the celebration of festivals such as *Raja* festival (the festival of fertility) and *Bhalukuni Osha* (a festival observed by unmarried girls on Sundays in the month of *Bhadraba* in honour of goddess Durga). During these festivals an atmosphere of mirth and merriment pervaded the entire village. *Raja*, *Bhalukuni Osha* and other festivals observed with gaiety and enthusiasm had inspired Bidyut Prabha to write poems such as 'Rajakamei', 'Manabasha', 'Dipabali', 'Prathamastami', 'Kuanra Punian' etc.

Bidyut Prabha, who was brought up in the city of Cuttack and accustomed to city life and urban manners evinced courage and adapted herself quickly to the new surroundings. The sensuous beauty of nature attracted her. Not only beauties of nature and joys of festivals were charming for this adolescent girl, the duties and responsibilities in her parental house brought her a kind of vivacity and excitement. At that tender age a sense of freedom and a capacity for undertaking responsibilities manifested in her personality.

Bidyut Prabha's stay at Natra had an important and lasting influence on her future life as a poet. When she had left Cuttack for Natra she was sad and depressed. At Natra her mind had undergone a change. There she enjoyed the light and shadow, the rain and the wind, the flowers and the foliage of rural nature. The bright moonbeams in the month of *Aswina* and the sweet smell of mango blossoms in spring had cast a spell on her.

Bidyut Prabha discovered her artistic potential and creative ability at Natra. Initially she composed short poems of two or four stanzas. Such ability sprang a surprise on her. Soon she wrote poems with naturalness and ease. Both Nimai and his son Bira Kishore were overwhelmed with joy to see Bidyut Prabha's poetic talent. Both of them procured books and magazines for

this young and budding poet. Bidyut Prabha knew that just poetic inspiration is not enough to write poetry. A lot of study and craftsmanship are also needed. She started the preparations at Natra. In the village she taught herself grammar, vocabulary, poetic idiom and diction. There she tried to enrich her knowledge of Oriya language by reading several types of books. She used to put down the meanings of various words in notebooks for future reference. She learnt some primary lessons on metre, forms and style of poetry. In fact she had her basic lessons on aesthetics while staying in the village.

Although she left her formal education while still a student of class IX, she educated herself with her own efforts. She taught herself Bengali and English. Though Nimai, her father, had broken her happy dream of being highly educated, he came forward to help his daughter after discovering her talent. He and Bidyut Prabha's brother encouraged her in writing poetry by publishing the poems in various magazines and arranging meetings and interviews with great Oriya litterateurs of the time such as Krushna Chandra Kar, Mayadhar Mansingh, Radha Mohan Gadanayak and Kunja Bihari Dash.

As Bidyut Prabha continued to write poems, her poetic style developed. She used *Matrachhanda* (a metre regulated by prosodical instants it contains). This metre imparted a new elegance and a sonorous quality to her poetry. Previously this metre was promoted by the noted Bengali poet, Rabindra Nath Tagore and later on Oriya poets such as Radha Mohan Gadanayak, Sachidananda Rautroy and Godabarish Mohapatra had adopted this metre for their poetry.

Bidyut Prabha's act of writing poetry progressed and she was on her way to perfect her art. She expressed her emotions and feelings through beautiful metrical verses thus producing fascinating poetry for the readers. She wrote poems on nature, man and society. In some poems she sang the glory of Orissa and its heroic past. Those became beautiful specimens of poetry at the touch of the magic wand of the poet's fancy and imagination. She had started writing poems at her village but her writing became faster, more lively, more varied and beautiful at Cuttack.

Gradually Bidyut Prabha became famous as a poet and became

a minor celebrity. She received accolade and got recognition. She received affection, blessings and encouragement from some of the established poets of Orissa. Krushna Chandra Kar, a famous poet and an intimate friend of Nimai Charan Das, not only bestowed his love and affection on her, he also guided her in poetic craftsmanship. Mayadhar Mansingh, the noted poet and litterateur would explain to her the difference between *Matrabrutta* and *Aksharabrutta* and advise her not to mix the two in her poetry and create metrical defects. Later on, the same Mayadhar Mansingh would recognize Bidyut Prabha's talent and appreciate the faultless metrical beauty of her poetry.

Though Bidyut Prabha had started writing poetry from 1940 onwards and her poems were published in literary magazines, with her elder sister Basanti who had written some poems, she published her first collection *Sabita* in 1944. It was a collection mostly of patriotic poems relating to the glory and grandeur of the land of Orissa. The next collection *Utkal Saraswata Prativa* was published in 1947. This collection and the other collections that were published subsequently included solely the writings of Bidyut Prabha.

Utkal Saraswata Prativa, as the title implies, is about the literary geniuses of Utkal. The poems included in this volume are paeans of praise for them. The poems show remarkable development of Bidyut Prabha's poetic powers. The language, metre and the wealth of imagination are superb. At that time she was just twenty-one. At this immature age she could spring a surprise in the hearts of many readers with her matured vision and skill in the art of poetic composition.

Two other collections, *Kanakanjali* and *Marichika* came out in the same year i.e. in 1948. In the preface to the former, Mayadhar Mansingh had written about Bidyut Prabha's natural genius and the spontaneity of her poetry. He had appreciated her empathy, enthusiasm and imaginative power, so also her mode of expression and her agreeable, felicitous and beautiful language. In the preface to *Marichika* Radha Mohan Gadanayak had emphasized on the poet's sympathy for the underdog and her concern for the sorrows and sufferings of the world.

Bidyut Prabha went on writing poetry. Her poetry revealed the subtle beauty of her feelings and experiences as well as her deep

thought. As a poet she was moving about in the world of ideas, feelings and imagination. But poetry could not lighten all the burden of her heart. Her own personal problems and the problems of the family were weighing heavily on her. During her adolescence she had difference of opinion with her father regarding her education, now there appeared another difference of opinion regarding her marriage. She wanted to devote her life, time and energy to writing poetry and not to lead a married life. Nimai himself was a writer. He was full of sympathy, appreciation and encouragement for Bidyut Prabha's writing of poetry. It was true that but for his help, untiring efforts and hard labour, Bidyut Prabha's poems and books could not have been published easily. He had the dream that his daughter would be an eminent writer. But he would not go against social customs and codes of conduct. He must give his daughter in marriage to a suitable and eligible young man. Moreover, he would not allow his daughter to attend meetings and conferences and keep her in purdah to some extent.

Nimai wanted her daughter to marry but Bidyut Prabha was reluctant. She was very much against the prevailing custom of dowry. The social attitude to marriage was repulsive to her. People want beauty in preference to quality. They want the bride to wear attractive marriage robe and glittering ornaments. They also want sumptuous marriage feasts and grand marriage processions. Bidyut Prabha was opposed to ostentation. She had simple tastes in matters of clothing, ornaments and food. Again she was apprehensive about the aftermath of her proposed marriage. What would she do if there won't be a meeting of minds between the two? What would happen if the would-be husband turns out to be a materialist with no regard for literature, culture, social service, intellectual and spiritual values? In that case her married life would be miserable and her poetic sensibility, poetic creation, aesthetic sense and spiritual quest would suffer.

For some time she was constantly perturbed by such thoughts. Another thought which disturbed her was her filial duty towards the father for whom she had deep love and respect. If she would disobey her father and refuse to marry he would be deeply hurt and discontented. In his old age he would suffer grief and humiliation. All these made her worried and restless.

Ultimately she gave her consent to marriage much against her will. The painful decision made her distressed.

During the period preceding her marriage, when her heart was full of anxiety and mind was unstable, her collection of poems *Bihayasi* (1949) was published. The noted litterateur, Kalindi Charan Panigrahi had commented that the twin themes, the sorrows and joys of life have been so deeply presented in *Bihayasi* that the book has become heart touching and extremely pleasant to read.

On 4th July 1949, Bidyut Prabha was married to Panchanan Mohanty of Agarapada in the present district of Bhadrak, which was a part of Balasore district at that time. Panchanan was an employee of Orissa Secretariat, which was located in Cuttack at that time. He was an ideal human being, a man of principle, a man who was against injustice, corruption and dishonesty. Before marriage Panchanan had not gone to see his would-be bride.

After marriage Bidyut Prabha went to stay in her father-in-law's house at Kuansamadhia (Agarapada), a village twenty-one kilometers away from Bhadrak town. The village was situated on the bank of the river, Salandi. It was the rainy season. Nature was at her best. The trees were thick with masses of green foliage. The river, Salandi was in spate. Bidyut Prabha was thrilled to see the beauty of nature. Before marriage she was unhappy and a silent pain was churning her heart. Now the beautiful scenes of nature and the companionship of her husband gave a lot of relief and happiness to her anxiety-ridden heart. She was also happy to discover that Panchanan was broad, high-minded, compassionate and a man of good taste and aesthetic sense. It seemed she got a new lease of life. She felt inspired to write poetry. Within the next six or seven months of her marriage she wrote numerous love poems that celebrated married love. In fact, Bidyut Prabha was one of the first to write the poetry of married love in Orissa. We see this depicted vividly in *Swapnadeepa* (1951) and *Jhara Shiuli* (1953). All the poems in these two volumes describe love-soaked experiences of a married woman in emotive language.

After her marriage the collection *Bandanika* (1950) was published. It was a collection of short poems written before her marriage. In this collection as well as in *Kanakanjali* (1948),

Marichika (1948) and *Bihayasi* (1949) that were published before her marriage we see beautiful poems on nature and country life. The poems in all these collections are enchantingly beautiful. In these books no love poem worth mentioning can be found. But after marriage, as has been hinted earlier, Bidyut Prabha was busy writing only love poems day after day. During this period the ideas and feelings that constitute the tenor of her poems are her personal experiences and those experiences are as intense as they are genuine.

While writing these love poems Bidyut Prabha was not leading a life of indolence in an imaginary world. She was doing the household chores with utmost sincerity. Those included winnowing rice, grinding black gram, crushing wheat and bringing water in a pitcher from the well. The poem 'Mati Kudia' (the mud hut) included in *Swapnadeepa* is not a figment of her imagination; it was her father-in-law's house where she lived. It was the same house in which her husband's ancestors had lived for seven generations. Her love and devotion for the house were not imaginary but very much real.

Although she was discharging household responsibilities she maintained her old study habit. She was very much punctual and disciplined in all her activities. Her mother-in-law belonged to Mahima Sect (a religious sect of Orissa who belived in pure non-dualism preached by Mahima Swami). Following the religious custom of the sect she was not eating at night and taking her supper before evening. Bidyut Prava prepared supper for all the members of the family before evening. After serving the evening meal she was reading and writing till late hours at night. The imaginary world of literature didn't distract her from worldly duties and responsibilities. She could strike a balance between her love of poetry and duty towards her family.

After her marriage Bidyut Prabha had fallen ill for some time. It was the result of her pre-marital anxiety and mental agony. A worried Panchanan made all arrangements for her medical treatment, but she did not agree to it. She regained her health only with the loving and comforting words, pleasant manners of her husband. The illness intensified their love and sympathy for each other. They realized that they were made for each other. The bond of love became so strong that they didn't need their own

private space for individual development. As the poet says in her poem 'Jigyansa', her life has no meaning without her husband. They have achieved a union of hearts and their love is immortal.

The years from 1950 to 1963 constitute the most remarkable period in Bidyut Prabha's life. During this period, some of her important works were published and she received awards for some of her books from the Government and from different organizations. She achieved fame and fortune. And what is more significant is the shift of her poetic mode after 1956. She made a switch from adult literature to children's literature and spiritual literature especially from 1957. No more did she write about the simple, charming and beautiful life of the countryside or about the weal and woe of human life.

In 1950 Bidyut Prabha's *Utkala Saraswata Pratibha* was prescribed as a poetry text by Utkal University for High School students. It was included in the syllabi for students of class X and class XI. In 1951 her book of poems *Marichika* was prescribed as poetry text for students of class VIII. Her two collections of love poems, *Swapnadeepa* and *Jharashiuli* were published in 1951 and 1952 respectively. In 1957 her collection of selected poems titled *Sanchayan* was published. Her first book of children's poetry *Jahaku Jie* was published in 1955. It received the best book on children's literature award from Government of India in 1956. The writer got a cash prize of five hundred rupees. Besides, the Government purchased two thousand copies of this book.

Friends' Publishers published *Mo Penkali Bajei De,* her second collection of children's poetry in 1960. It became so popular that very soon a second edition of the book was published. Sahitya Jagat of Balasore published *Gachha Patara* the same year. This book received an award from Children's Literature Committee of Orissa state. In 1961, *Mu Kemiti Pila* came out. Upendra Mishra, the editor of *Banaphula*, published it. Oriya Book Emporium published *Kahinki Tume* in 1963. After a few years *Padhutha Hasi Hasi Gadutha* was published in 1966.

The period under report is important from another point of view. All her four children were born during this period. Her first child, Minati, a daughter was born in August 1952. From the time she conceived this child till a few months after her birth Bidyut

Prabha led a disciplined and routine life. She had the firm belief that a mother should lead such life particularly during the gestation period for the complete development of the baby. Her second child Sachidananda, a son was born in December 1953. This child was sick for a long time and on this account his parents had to suffer a lot. Bidyut Prabha's third child and second son Brhamananda was born in 1958 and the last child, the second daughter Pranati was born in October 1961.

After becoming a mother she was naturally attracted towards children. She wrote children's poetry. The titles of such poetry collections have already been mentioned. The poems written for children were simple, charming and funny and through these poems the poet wanted to impart education to children.

Two more incidents occurred during this period, one is the construction of a house at Cuttack and the other is the promotion of Bidyut Prabha's husband, Panchanan Mohanty. Initially Panchanan was reluctant to build a house because of financial difficulties. But Nimai, his father-in-law was insistent. Efforts were made to arrange finances. In 1956 Bidyut Prabha had received a cash award of five hundred rupees from Government of India for her book *Jahaku Jie*. She had saved that money and also the sale-proceeds of two thousand copies of the same book, which the Government had purchased. With that money a plot of land was bought. For building the house loan was arranged from different sources and Bidyut Prabha sold all her ornaments. Overcoming several hurdles and impediments the construction of the house was completed. For this house the family had to face financial difficulty for a long time.

Panchanan was a very efficient and dutiful Government servant. He had started his service career as a clerk in Orissa Secretariat. In 1957 he was promoted to the rank of a gazetted officer. He joined Orissa Financial Service and was posted as Asst. Commercial Tax Officer at Cuttack. Again in 1963 he received another promotion and became Additional Commercial Tax Officer. In 1976 he became a Class-I officer and was posted as Financial Advisor and Chief Accounts Officer in the office of the Director of Public Instruction, Orissa. In 1981 he was posted as Financial Advisor-cum-Deputy Secretary to Government in the Department of Higher Education.

In 1959 Bidyut Prabha learnt certain things about The Mother, Sri Aurobindo and his philosophy from Raghunath Mohanty, one of her relations. She came to know that Sri Aurobindo was a man of extraordinary powers and that he had guided thousands of people both in and outside India on the path of higher spiritual goal and in this mission the Mother had co-operated with him.

Aurobindo had realized that permanent peace and happiness could be achieved only through spiritual awakening. Through meditation and integral Yoga he had transcended the mind and achieved higher knowledge at Pondichery. Supra-mental power had descended on his soul. Descent of the Supermind was a new chapter in the spiritual history of the world. Aurobindo's deep meditation and the enlightenment he received had brought a bright possibility for the human race. The path to achieve supra-mental power was opened. Gradually devotees and spiritual seekers came to him and Pondichery became a holy place for spiritual pursuit. In 1914 the Mother came to Aurobindo Ashram at Pondichery and stayed there till the end of her life dedicating herself to spiritual pursuit. In 1926 Aurobindo entrusted all the responsibilities of the Ashram to the Mother and absorbed himself completely in deep mediation.

After learning all this from Raghunath Mohanty, Bidyut Prabha became interested in Aurobindo Ashram and his philosophy. She wanted to know more about Aurobindo and the Mother. She met Babaji Maharaj (Sri Ramakrishna Das), a senior disciple of Aurobindo. She also met Bihari Lal Pattanayak at Balasore. Mr. Pattanayak was a devotee of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. From him she knew many things about the two seers, which had a deep impact on her. After that Bidyut Prabha and Panchanan became associated with Sri Aurobindo *Pathachakra* (Study Circle) of Unit-II, Bhubaneswar.

Both Bidyut Prabha and Panchanan became deeply interested in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. They participated in all the activities of the *Pathachakra*. Gradually a *Pathachakra* for women was established there and Bidyut Prabha became its secretary. She had so much punctuality, sincerity and sense of discipline that she could manage the organization with extraordinary efficiency.

In 1963 she visited the Pondichery Ashram for the first time

and had a darshan of the Mother. The deft and orderly management of Sri Aurobindo Ashram enchanted her. She was particularly impressed by the excellent arrangements for children at the Centre for Integral Education of the Ashram so much so that she wanted to leave her children there for their education.

During this visit her vision of life changed. No more did she think of Orissa. She considered herself to be an Ashramite. Henceforth she became a true follower and a real devotee of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and sang their glory in her poems.

Bidyut Prabha did not have faith in the prevailing system of education of our country. She thought that the purpose of education is complete development of personality but it is impossible to achieve this goal in our book-centred education. Such education is not related to life. It won't help one to realize one's potential nor would it make one capable enough to face the realities of life. Moreover, Bidyut Prabha laid stress on the health and manners of children. The existing system of education was neglecting these two aspects. She wanted education to be integral and multifaceted.

Thinking that it would be ideal to send her children to the Centre for Integral Education at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, she sought permission from the Ashram. After securing necessary permission Bidyut Prabha and Panchanan took their two older children Minati and Sachidananda to the Ashram and got them admitted in the Centre for Integral Education in December 1966. After a few years i.e. in March 1971 their two younger children, Brahmananda and Pranati were also admitted in the same institution. At that time Bidyut Prabha was staying in Aurobindo Ashram. About the education of her children at the Centre for Integral Education, Sri Prapatti, a great devotee of Aurobindo and the Mother had said: 'Bidyut Prabha has surrendered all her children at the lotus feet of the Mother in Sri Aurobindo Ashram for their education and spiritual development. She has realized that, it is the safest and the best place for them'.

Bidyut Prabha's whole being was permeated with devotion to the Mother. She composed twenty-eight songs in which she described the Mother's glory, invoked her blessings, and expressed her own gratitude to the Mother. These songs were published in an anthology entitled *Puspanjali* in January 1967.

She had dedicated this book to the Mother; with her heart filled with devotion, she had offered the book at the Mother's feet on 20th February 1967.

That year some tragic incidents occurred in her life. In April 1967 Panchanan was taken ill suddenly. Bidyut Prabha attended him apart from doing all household chores. Hard work adversely affected her health. To add to her suffering something happened in her joint family, which left her depressed and she lost her faith in man. This aggravated her suffering and she became terribly ill. She took all kinds of medicine-allopathic, homeopathic and Aurvedic but could not get back her health. Both physical and mental suffering made her desperate. One day she threw herself into the waters of Bindusagar tank with the purpose of committing suicide. She was rescued from drowning by people who were nearby. When she was saved she told others that the Mother had saved her from death by drowning because she wanted to do some significant work through her.

This thought gave her sufficient mental strength. But she was still physically ill. Doctors advised her to go for a major operation. Bidyut Prabha didn't accept their advice nor did her father Nimai. Her elder brother took her to Raghunath Sahu, an eminent doctor and under his treatment she got back her health. Now she felt comfortable and was free from anxiety. She expressed her gratitude to the Mother thinking that it was the Mother alone who had cured her of the disease.

The organizers of Sri Aurobindo *Pathachakra* proposed to establish an Integral Education Centre at Bhubaneswar. They sent some lady teachers to Sri Aurobindo Ashram to learn about the integral education system. In June 1970 Bidyut Prabha accompanied them to Pondichery. The holy atmosphere of the Ashram gave her immense joy. The community spirit of the inmates, their mode of living and their unbreakable faith in the Mother impressed her. She was also attracted towards natural treatment of diseases meted out to patients in the Ashram. On the advice of a devotee, Bholeswar Bhuyan, she met Taraknath Bosh, a physician of the Ashram and learnt many things from him about natural treatment of diseases. The procedure of cooking in the Ashram kitchen and the discipline in the dining hall were remarkable for her. There in the kitchen food was prepared by

boiling the ingredients with steam and by that the food value was not wasted. She decided that when she would come back to Bhubaneswar she would adopt that cooking procedure in her house and teach it to others.

During her stay at Pondichery, Bidyut Prabha wrote three books, namely, *Jyotisikha, Suryamukhi* and *Mati Pani Pabana.* The poems of *Jyotisikha* describe the different organizations, institutions, the environment, the eminent personalities and activities of the Ashram.

The poems of *Suryamukhi* are mostly prayers to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and some are invocations to them for help, protection and blessings. *Mati Pani Pabana* is a new kind of book. The poems of this collection depict the utility of earth, water and air and the healing powers of nature. The poems, though very simple, are highly philosophical. These are entertaining and instructive at the same time particularly for children.

At this time Bidyut Prabha was thinking of staying permanently at Sri Aurobindo Ashram for the rest of her life. She sought the Mother's permission but she did not get it. The Mother advised her to go back to Orissa and work there. Perhaps the Mother thought Bidyut Prabha had enough organizational ability and deep devotion. So she could spread Aurobindo's philosophy with dedication and sincerity.

Bidyut Prabha's life was dedicated to the Mother. For her the Mother was the Divine Mother, the Mother of the Universe. She was Maheswari, Mahakali, Mahalaxmi and Mahasaraswati, all rolled into one. She was the saviour and preserver of the universe. Bidyut Prabha had the desire to spend the rest of her life in the service of the Mother. So when she was advised to leave Pondichery she was deeply grieved. But she consoled herself with the thought that the Mother is all pervading and she would bless and protect her wherever she may be. Gradually her grief and disappointment disappeared. She came back to Orissa.

The three books she had written at Sri Aurobindo Ashram were her last contributions to Oriya literature. With the publication of these books her poetic life came to an end. She had decided to abandon the world of imagination and work wholeheartedly for the Mother using all her energy, ability and skill. She would carry out the instruction of the Mother for that was inviolable for her.

By this time she had got back her health and her mind was also free. She had left her children at Pondichery under the Mother's care–that is what her heart prompted her to believe and now she would serve the Mother by carrying out her instruction.

The first task she undertook for herself was to model her house on Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The manner of living, the procedure of cooking and dining must be followed in her house. First she would emulate those and then ask others to do the same. Prayers and meditation were regularly conducted in her house. The family members took food that was boiled with steam. They stopped using chilly and spices. A simple diet, an assortment of rice, dal and one vegetable curry was preferred.

Both Bidyut Prabha and Panchanan chose naturopathy for any kind of ailment. They practised *Asanas*, exercises, and morning walk, mud treatment and sitting on hip-bath. Bidyut Prabha encouraged others to do so. In fact she wanted every house to become a replica of Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

At that time *Pathachakra* used to be held every Saturday at the Integral Education Centre in Bhubaneswar. After returning from Pondichery, Bidyut Prabha attended the *Pathachakra* regularly. She proposed to hold discussions on the rules and regulations and activities especially health related activities of the Ashram. Accordingly meditation and *Asanas* were practised in the morning and the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo about health were also discussed. Apart from this, another decision was taken to go from door to door for propagating Aurobindo's philosophy and the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. A committee was formed to organize this activity and Bidyut Prabha was made the secretary of this committee. All the members were quite enthusiastic about this agenda and the work progressed rapidly. But after a few months the pace of work slowed down because the members dissociated themselves from work. Only Bidyut Prabha and Panchanan continued it.

Bidyut Prabha was immersed in the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The Mother's death in November 1973 was a great blow for her and a major set back for all the followers and devotees of the Mother. Bidyut Prabha was very much restless and worried because she thought the devotees wouldn't get the necessary direction and guidance in the absence of the Mother.

However, she didn't lose heart. She took up a well-planned agenda and tried to implement it. She went to meet women of every age group and tried to change their attitudes to life. She persuaded them to follow the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and convert their households into minuscule Ashramas. She tried to convince them that they were leading a futile and meaningless life. Without doing anything significant, they were spending most of their time only in cooking, and serving food to the members of their family. She advised them to change their food habits. She taught them new procedures of cooking, different *Asananas* and naturopathy. During this period she had written a One-Act-Play entitled *Bibaha* (*Marriage*) to propagate the ideals of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother pertaining to marriage.

In November 1974 Bidyut Prabha got the news that her elder son was suffering from jaundice and being treated. During that month the death anniversary of the Mother was to be observed. Bidyut Prabha was reluctant to join the death anniversary. However, she went to Pondichery, attended the programme and looked after her son's health. She had recourse to naturopathy and her son was cured of the disease. But suddenly she fell ill. As she didn't agree to any other treatment except naturopathy, her treatment was prolonged.

A great change was noticed in her. She wanted to stay alone and be free from all illusions and attachments. In 1975 while she was still at Pondichery her mother-in-law died. Instead of observing the traditional death rites she made arrangements for meditation, discussions and eating of *prasad*. When her father had died in 1970 she had made similar arrangements. The peaceful atmosphere at Pondichery had made her calm and quiet. She was thinking of staying there. But suddenly she changed her mind and came back to Bhubaneswar on 20th April 1975.

At this time she had some mental problems. She kept aloof from others. There was deviation in her routine life. She didn't do the regular exercises and meditation. Towards the end of October 1975 she suffered from rheumatism. Some symptoms of mental derangement appeared in her. There was no consistency in her conversation and manners. Occasionally she would go away from the house and nobody could prevent her from going.

She was kept under psychiatric treatment. The doctor put her

on sleeping-drug and taking this drug she was sleeping most of the time. As a result she lost all her natural agility and vivacity. Both her physical and mental condition deteriorated. She felt severe pain in her stomach and completely lost her appetite. Though she underwent all kinds of medical treatment the result was discouraging. She became very much worried not only about her terrible illness but also about others especially her husband who attended her. She thought that she had become a burden on others.

On 28th January 1977, before daybreak, Bidyut Prabha vanished from home. A search party failed to find her. After sometime the news spread that she had committed suicide under a running train lying on the railway track. Nobody could believe that Bidyut Prabha had taken such an extreme step and her life could come to such a harrowing end. Her pathetic untimely death at the age of fifty-one shattered the feelings of many-those of her family members, relatives, acquaintances, the avid and sympathetic readers of her poetry and her fellow devotees.

Although Bidyut Prabha died a premature death at the age of fifty one, she had by that time achieved a lot of success and fame by her works and by her activities. She was a 'literary domestic' who found herself in domestic setting and yet had literary aspirations. She fulfilled her literary aspirations and became a popular poet of Orissa. There was no discord between her domestic life and literary life. She was successful in different roles she played-the roles of a daughter, a wife, a mother, a housewife, a poet, a devotee and an organizer.

From the very beginning of her life Bidyut Prabha was deeply spiritual by temperament. Materialism did not have any hold on her. That is why she trod on the path of truth and piety. She loved her husband, children, friends, relatives and people at large but she was detached in her love.

There is coherence between Bidyut Prabha's life and poetic development. As an adolescent who had the potential of a poet she was attracted towards the eminent litterateurs especially the eminent poets of Orissa. And this attraction resulted in the collection of poems, *Utkal Saraswata Pratibha*. Because of her conservative background, which did not allow her to read beyond class IX, she could not keep abreast of modern developments. Hence devlopments in modern thought and literary movements

had no influence on her poetry. Even Indian nationalism, national problems, including female education and female empowerment could not be the stuff of her poetry. If any nationalistic fervour is to be found in her poetry it is about the rich and heroic heritage of Orissa.

But she was a lover of nature. She was rooted in certain values and sympathies belonging to her own tradition. She was a romantic and a lover of nature, hence the sensuous apprehension of beauty of nature in many of her poems. After marriage she has written a number of love poems and she is one of the first to write poetry of married love in Orissa. Such love has been depicted in *Swapnadeepa* and *Jhara Shiuli.*

After becoming a mother she has shifted her focus and written children's poetry, which she continued to write for some years. And when she has become a devotee of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo she has written devotional poems about them.

The most remarkable features of her poetry are her deep humanistic gesture and feminine grace. She looked at life and nature with the eye of a poet. For her the whole world was bursting with life. Her poetry was conventional, authentic, natural and musical. She did not attempt to emulate the mannered and imitative style of modern poets. Hence she had a large readership.

Using her experiences, passions, emotions and thought, Bidyut Prabha has written various types of poetry in various modes i.e. patriotic, eulogistic, nationalistic, realistic, romantic, and devotional as well as children's poetry in lyrical, descriptive, narrative, visionary and reflective modes suited to the context and the mood. She has written a lone novel *'Niswa Jagat'* and a One-Act Play, *Bibaha*. Poetry has been her passion and forte. Ill health, both physical and mental, towards the fag end of her life dried up the spring of creativity in her. She dedicated her life completely to the service and cause of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo till the very end.

The Writings

When Bidyut Prabha came on the scene the Modern Age in Oriya Literature had established itself firmly and had become a settled tradition assimilating a number of new forms and attitudes from the West and harmonizing them with native styles and moods. But she was least affected by the modern trends. She remained a follower of the old, indigenous tradition writing musical verses on conventional themes mostly related to country life. She followed the examples set by noted Oriya poets such as Nanda Kishore Bal, Godabarish Mishra, Mayadhar Mansingh, Krushna Chandra Tripathy and Radhamohan Gadanayak. Their treatment of nature, country life, social reality and their essentially romantic attitude to life had a lasting impact on her. Moreover, the concerns and obligations of the traditional Indian woman had captured her imagination. In the later phase of her poetic career when she switched over to writing children's poetry, we find a kind of moral fervour and didactic tone in her poems. After becoming a devotee of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo she wrote poems expressing her devotion to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and on Aurobindo's philosophy. But all her poems, whether secular or spiritual, descriptive or narrative, sensuous or didactic, are written in musical verses.

Bidyut Prabha is an eminent poet of the post independent period of Orissa. Though she had started writing a few years before Indian independence, most of her important works appeared during the period beginning from 1947 to 1957. In fact, this is the first phase of her poetic career, which shows the evolution of her poetic craft and maturing of poetic vision. This is the most fruitful period of her poetic career when she carved out a name for herself as a distinguished poet and reached the acme of success. During this period she had written a large number of poems that reveal her sound aesthetic sense. The tender feelings and emotions vented through emotive words and expressions and the sheer beauty of these poems draw the readers' attention and stir their imagination with their sound and sense.

During this first phase Bidyut Prabha had published nine poetry collections. Those were *Utkala Saraswata Pratibha* (1947), *Kanakanjali* (1948), *Marichika* (1948), *Bihayasi* (1949), *Bandanika* (1950), *Swapnadeepa* (1951), *Jhara Shiuli* (1952), *Jahaku Jie* (1953) and *Sanchayana* (1957). Prior to the publication of these books, Bidyut Prabha along with her sister Basanti had published her first collection, *Sabita* in 1944.

Sabita published in collaboration with her sister contains poems on their native land Orissa, its splendour, its heroes and its architectural marvel, Konark. It also contains poems on mother cow, women, old men, the poet's penury, her love for nature and human values. Because of their deep love for Orissa, the land of their birth, the two poets have glorified it in their poems. Their love for their native land and their patriotic fervour are apparent from the outset. We see these in the very first stanza of the first poem 'Odia' of this collection:

I am overwhelmed with excitement
When I hear the name, Odia
It makes me see everything
Every grain of sand
Tells of the valour and glory
of my land.

('Odia', *Sabita, Bidyut Prabha Granthabali,* Part I, p.5. All the lines quoted in this text from Bidyut Prabha's works are from *Bidyut Prabha Granthabali* [The Complete Works of Bidyut Prabha], Cuttack : Friends' Publishers, 1983. *Bidyut Prabha Granthabali* has been abbreviated to *BPG* in the text. The translations from the Oriya are by the author.)

Being attracted by the literary geniuses of Orissa Bidyut Prabha has paid them the highest tribute in her poems included in *Utakala Saraswata Pratibha*. Those poems bear the imprint of her heartfelt love, affection and regard for those eminent littérateurs of Orissa. They include ancient poets such as Sarala Das, Balaram Das and Jagannath Das; medieval poets like Upendra Bhanja, Dinakrushna, Abhimanyu, Baladeb, Gopal Krushna and modern littérateurs such as Radhanath, Madhusudan, Fakir Mohan, Kuntala Kumari, Gopabandhu, Godabarish and others. These poems, in effect, are paeans of praise and they lack richness and variety. Though all the thirty three poems of this

anthology are written in monotone nevertheless they are loving and respectful to those immortal poets and littérateurs of Orissa.

A spirit of nationalism was at work behind some of the poems of *Sabita* and all the poems of *Utkal Saraswata Pratibha*. When Bidyut Prabha started writing poetry she had before her a strong nationalist tradition. During the second half of nineteenth century and the first four decades of twentieth century Western education, contact with Western civilization and culture through this education and the struggle for Indian independence had created the spirit of nationalism among Indians. Consequently the Indian writers began to glorify their land, their people, their tradition and heritage. Radhanath Ray was the first poet of Orissa who wrote nationalist poems in Oriya. In his poetry the pride in his own land has been converted into pride in his own country. His poetry gave an almost total exposure of Orissa, that is, Orissa's places, rivers, mountains as well as its flora, fauna, history and heritage, a unique feat where Orissa comes alive like a living organism, hardly surpassed by any other Oriya writer.

The pan-Indian nationalist sentiment that had grown up in the last part of the nineteenth century and taken a shape in the formation of Indian National Congress became bold and aggressive at the turn of the century. This had its impact on Orissa and Orissa's thinking public. The Central Young Utkal Association was founded in 1904, in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. This Association spread strong socio-political awareness and attracted a large number of students and youngsters to its public meetings, the purpose being to further aggressive nationalism for the achievement of independence from foreign rule.

Along with this growth of general nationalistic sentiments, a kind of sub nationalism grew among the Oriyas to establish their identity through the formation of a separate province. For this the leadership was given by Madhusudan Das, through Utkal Sammilani, which was formed in 1903, and subsequently put forth its claims for a separate province, that was effected in 1936. Thus when the Satyabadi School (a rural residential school) was established in 1909, through the efforts of Gopabandhu Das at Satyabadi near Puri, it combined the prevailing spirit of nationalism with a strong desire for a separate province of Orissa

for all Oriya speaking people, along with tendencies for social reform, and for a new, nationalistic education and literature.

This school provided the impetus for a powerful movement in socio-political field as well as in literature, and the chief exponents such as Gopabandhu, Nilakantha, Godabarish and Krupasindhu particularly, emerged as very competent writers. Their combined creative work written between 1909 and 1925 was a substantial body of nationalist literature. It was nationalistic in so far as it expressed sentiments against contemporary British administration, desire for Oriya nationalism and need for uniting Oriya speaking tracts. This literature also reminded the people of Orissa about their glorious heritage and of the courage and exploits of their past heroes.

It must have been due to such reasours that Bidyut Prabha's national consciousness turned to her native land Orissa, its glorious history and legends, heroic personalities and eminent littérateurs. So in *Utkala Saraswata Pratibha* and some poems of *Sabita,* she glorifids Orissa, its heritage and its heroes. In 'Utkala Kesharee Madhusudan' she described Madhusudan Das as a hero and true patriot who had removed the darkness of ignorance from Orissa with the light of knowledge. He was an excellent orator, a lover of truth, fearless, selfless and generous. He was concerned about his native land till he breathed his last. Paying the highest tribute to him, the poet writes:

Oh Patriarch Madhusudan!
You are the father of new Utkal
Forever
The Oriya nation is indebted to you.
(*Utkala Saraswata Pratibha*, *BPG*, Part-I, p.57)

She addressed Radhanath Ray as Kabikula Guru (The teacher of the clan of poets) and as the sun of the literary firmament. She herself has accepted him as her teacher. In fact, Bidyut Prabha was influenced by his patriotism, romantic consciousness and love of nature. Paying a glowing tribute to Radhanath she has written:

The woods and graves
The lakes, rivers and the islets
Were lying insensate,
At the magic touch of your brush

They seemed to smile
after washing their faces at dawn.
('Prakrutipriya Radhanath', *Utkal Saraswata Pratibha*, *BPG*. Part I, p.40)

Bidyut Prabha wrote such nationalist poems during the years beginning from 1944 to 1947. But it is strange that the enthusiasm, promise and sacrifices for Indian Independence found in the national life of Indians is missing in her poetry of this period.

The poet began to write poems that were mostly romantic. By definition romantic poetry is marked by feeling rather than intellect. It prefers wild nature, passion etc. to order and proportion. When Bidyut Prabha was writing poetry, Indian romantic poetry was already under the influence of English romantic poets such as William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge, John Keats, P.B. Shelly and William Blake. Wordsworth, the greatest and most influential English poet had dealt with materials from 'common life in a selection of language really used by men'. In his poetry we see serious or tragic treatment of lowly subjects in common language. S.T. Coleridge, and John Keats had exploited the supernatural and 'the far away' and 'the long ago'. William Blake, William Wordsworth and P.B. Shelley assumed the persona of a poet-prophet who writes visionary poetry. Blake and Shelley used poetic symbolism in which objects are charged with significance beyond their physical qualities.

To a remarkable degree external nature-the landscape, together with its flora, fauna – are a persistent subject of romantic poetry. The English Romantic Poets described nature with an accuracy and sensuous nuance unprecedented in earlier writers. But nature was described not for the sake of description. The outer scenes were not present for their own sake but only as stimuli for the poets to engage in the most characteristic human activity, that of thinking. Representative romantic poems are in fact poems of feeling and meditation, which though stimulated by a natural phenomenon, are concerned with central human experiences and problems. Wordsworth asserted that it is 'the mind of man which is my haunt and the main region of my song'.

Bidyut Prabha's poetry shows most of the characteristic features of English romantic poetry. She collected poetic materials

from common life and wrote poems in the 'language really used by men.' Her emotions and feelings came out spontaneously in her poems. In his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth had repeatedly declared that good poetry is 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.' He said if a poem is to be genuine it must be spontaneous, unforced, and free of the artifice of rules and conventions. Bidyut Prabha's poems depict external nature, the flora and fauna of the countryside. In fact, love and admiration for nature and the loveliness and exuberance of village life in the lap of nature are two major themes of her poetry. Referring to Bidyut Prabha's depiction of nature the noted Oriya litterateur, Kunjabihari Dash has observed: "Bidyut Prabha's poetry depicts the swift ripples of the autumn corn fields, the free and unimpeded flow of the spring and the mysterious murmur of the verdant woods (Preface to *Bandanika*, *BPG*. Part I , p. 231).

Bidyut Prabha's love of nature gave rise to many lyrical poems that are included in anthologies such as *Kanakanjali*, *Marichika*, *Bandanika* and *Bihayasi*. The poet loved nature with a passion amounting almost to devotion. The springs, rivers, moonlit nights, clouds, mountains, cornfields, trees, creepers, flowers, fruits, grass and dew had cast a spell on her. Examples are ubiquitous in her poetry. In the poem '*Chaitree*' (The Fullmoon Day of the month of Chaitra) we see a sensuous description of the beauty of nature:

In the mango grove
The vernal breeze has poured
The wine of love,
On the soft bed
Of fallen madhavi flowers
sleeps the Chaitra-maiden.

('Chaitree', *'Bandanika'*, *BPG*. Part I, p. 237)

In 'Nali Kain' the red lily is described with accuracy and sensuous nuance. Nature, here, is described not merely for the sake of description. While describing the flower the poet is engaged in contemplation:

Her fleeting smile may fade
And fall on the water
Still her life is fruitful

On this earth
Growing on ooze
Displaying her exotic beauty
She tells the beholder
To build life, like her,
on the foundation of sorrow.

('Nali Kain', '*Bihayasi*', *BPG.* Part I, p. 207)

The poet prefers the beauty of the earth to the beauty and opulence of heaven. She thinks she cannot find the same beauty and delight in the winking eyes of fairies as she finds in the dance of nature in the month of Bhadraba. The earth is her sweet home. It gives her motherly affection. Its natural beauty is enchanting. Hence, she has no desire for the heaven. ('Loda Nahin Swarga,' *Marichika*, *BPG.* Part I, p.143).

Bidyut Prabha drew materials from her own life as well as from 'common life' for the themes of her poetry. Romantic poets, instead of trying to be objective, revel in their own personalities. The American romanticist Walt Whitman had said: 'I celebrate myself and sing myself'. Bidyut Prabha has written about the common man but she has also written about herself. She has narrated her emotion-charged past experiences in poems such as 'Barshasmruti', 'Bishmruta Gāthā and 'Bādua Smruti'. So also she has portrayed the lives of farmers, married women, unmarried girls, the cowherd boys and the ploughmen of the village with keen insight, deep sympathy and élan. The rites and rituals, customs and conventions, festivals, and ceremonies enriching village life have also been depicted. One can discern an inquisitiveness in Bidyut Prabha, which is similar to that of Nanda Kishore Bala, the famous country poet of Orissa. But while Nanda Kishore was skilled in delineating the scenes of the countryside Bidyut Prabha was deft in portraying the life of the country folk. Hence, one finds charming vignettes of the cowherd boy, the ploughman, the village maiden and the newly married woman in her poetry.

In her poems the common men and women talk and express their feelings in the language really used by them. Bidyut Prabha has depicted lively pictures of the agonized heart of a mother pining for her recently married daughter while arranging the first gifts to be sent to her mother-in-law's house ('Raja Kamei',

'*Kanakanjali*'); the anxiety of the villagers to see Nāba, a girl of the village coming to her native place after ten years of her marriage ('*Suari Daka*', '*Kanakanjali*'), and the activities of a naughty adolescent boy getting ready to strike birds with pellets ('Pallipathe', '*Bandanika*').

The romantic emotion of love is a major theme of Bidyut Prabha's poetry. Bidyut Prabha is one of the first to write the poetry of married love in Orissa. In the preface to *Jhara Shiuli* she has mentioned that the dream of love of her early youth has become a reality in her married life filled with thrilling experiences of love. Such experiences would disappear with the passage of time but the sweet memories of love and its beautiful images will remain in the innermost recesses of her heart. The poet is sure that those memories of youthful love would vibrate in her mind and remain fresh throughout her life. ('Ābhāsa', *Jhara Shiuli*, *BPG*, Part I, p. 325).

Bidyut Prabha's love poems have been included in collections such as *Marichika, Bihayasi, Bandanika, Swapnadeepa* and *Jhara Shiuli*. The love poems included in the first three collections are of general nature but all the poems in the last two anthologies are love poems that depict and celebrate the poet's experiences of married love. 'Shiuli Pade Jhari', 'Dheu Smruti', 'Milana Raga', 'Mu O Tume', 'Palli Prema' are some of her representative love poems. In the opinion of the poet, love is heavenly, it is a union of two souls and it can create a heaven on earth. Conjugal love is by far the best and most enjoyable. Love outside marriage is beset with troubles, fear, anxiety, scandals and slanders. Such love often results in suffering and agony. In 'Sabuja Preeti' the poet narrates the love blossoming between Bana, the cowherd boy and Pitei, a bauri (a low caste) girl. Finally they elope because society won't allow their inter-caste marriage. They run away to fructify and consummate their forbidden love and never dare to come back to their village.

The poet celebrates conjugal love, which for her is an eternal bond between two souls. Marriage is more a union of two hearts than two bodies. For her body is secondary in love and hence she tells her mate:

> If love means
> Lusting for body

Then stay away
Leaving me to weep
over the past.
If you desire
To gratify your lust
I'll forget my youth
And break
these bonds of attachment.

('Jigyansa', *Swapnadeepa*, *BPG*. Part I, p. 312)

It is not that the poet has relegated physical love completely to the background. In 'Basara Ratri' she celebrates physical love when their marriage is being consummated. For her the close embrace of the lovers is the most desirable wealth. She very much wishes that the bridal night won't come to an end, the sacred burning lamp won't be extinguished and the lovers would go on enjoying the thrills of physical love. Surpassing the whiteness of butter their lather-white marital bed would see their love-sport and hear their love - song. No erotic fancy has been explicitly displayed in this poem but the passionate desire has been expressed in a controlled and subdued tone ('Bāsara Ratri', *Swarnadeepa*, *BPG*. Part I, p. 299).

In some of her poems one notices a romantic longing for far-off things. In "Prabhāta Banshee" she writes:

I don't know
Who is playing on the flute
And where
But my enchanted heart follows
The sound of his music
When I hear his music
My youth goes into raptures
With honey-sweet expectations
I'll search for him
From one end of the earth
To the other
I don't know
Who is playing on the flute and where?

('Prabhāta Banshee', *Bihayasi*, *BPG*. Part I, p. 192)

And in 'Alakāpuri' she describes the mythological kingdom of Alkapuri where happiness reigns supreme. This land is free from

sorrow, suffering, tears, pain, dreams, jealousy, violence, old age, death, falsehood and sin which beset our world. The beauty of Alakāpuri has no parallel in the three worlds. It is the dream creation of the Creator. Since she herself cannot see the place she asks the cloud to see this dream creation of God and fructify its life ('Alakāpuri', *Bandanika*, *BPG.* Part I, pp. 253-258).

In some of her poems Bidyut Prabha urged the poets to come to the world of reality leaving behind the luxury and dreaminess of the world of imagination. In these poems she behaves like an idealist. In 'Bilāsi Kavi' she called upon the poets to write about the realities of life:

You roamed throughout the world
Crossing the seven seas
And the thirteen rivers
Did you see everywhere
only beautiful pictures
of luxury?
Your poetry is of no use
If you luxuriate
In the spring breeze
And your pen doesn't portray
the pathetic picture of pain.
('Bilāsi Kavi', *Marichika*, *BPG*, Part I, p. 145)

She becomes more specific in 'Bilāsa Kalpana' and urges the poets to abandon the luxury of imagination and portray the pain, poverty and starvation of the poor and the oppressed people:

How long would you portray
The picture of the magic-world
with the brush of your imagination?
Once look at
this wretched woman's body
emaciated with hunger.
Can't he, whose face is pale,
With the pain of poverty
be the worthy protagonist
of your poems?
Have you ever pondered
over the pathetic history of men
from whose lips

smile has disappeared
forever?

('Bilāsa Kalpana', *Bandanika*, *BPG*. Part I, p. 279).

When Bidyut Prabha was writing poetry realism had taken root in Oriya literature. Realism is said to represent life as it really is. Realistic literature is written so as to give the effect that it represents life and society as it seems to the common reader evoking the sense that its characters might in fact exist and that the events described might well happen. Realism which was a nineteenth century movement in European literature had come to Orissa at the end of the nineteenth century and its impact was strongly felt in the early decades of twentieth century when writers wrote in the realistic mode. Radhanath Ray had started the realistic trend in Oriya poetry. Realism was further accentuated in the poetry of '*Satyabadi Juga*' and later by the nationalist poets especially the progressive poets such as Raghunath Das, Manmohan Mishra, Bira Kishore Das, Ananta Pattanyak, Sachidananda Rautroy, Godabarish Mohapatra et al who were influenced by Marxism. These poets succeeded to a great extent in removing idealism and romantic sentiments from the domain of Oriya poetry.

In the post-independent Oriya poetry realism became a dominant trend and developed in various ways. Bidyut Prabha felt the impact of this new trend. Though she continued to write romantic poetry, she wrote some poems in the realistic vein. In this context the poems such as 'Jeevanachakra', 'Durgatāra Prathama Patra', 'Kirāni Bohu', 'Pratighāta', 'Bilasa Kalpana', 'Rickshawalla', 'Kalikata Kuli', 'Pallipathe', 'Prabāsa Moha', 'Palli Prema', 'Krushaka O Bhabuka', 'Matira Manisha', 'Ashrubāni', 'Chhuti Pharamas', 'Bismaya', 'Bidhabā', 'Biddhā Upare Biddhā', 'Sehi Matighara', are worth mentioning. In 'Jeevana Chakra' the poet has given a philosophical account of the realities of life beginning from birth till death. The other poems depict realities of village life as well as domestic life. These poems have a lot of melancholy and pathos but those have been sublimated and raised to the level of highly aesthetic emotions.

In her own case Bidyut Prabha's poetic creation was concomitant with domestic responsibilities. She relished the two at the same time:

Poetry can go with
One's home, family and domestic chores
Without the latter
Life is meaningless,
A cry of distress;
In the absence of the same
Poetry tastes bitter
And life becomes painful
as the thought of death.

('Kunijhia', *Sanchayan*, *BPG*, Part-I, p.389)

But in a different mood, when she finds domestic reality too much to bear she grumbles about the worries and troubles of domestic life that don't give her enough time to write poetry:

My life is full of worries,
Multifarious duties consume my soul.
When diseases, troubles and wants
eat into my time
Where is the scope
to write poetry?

('Pratighāta', *Sanchayana, BPG.,* Part I, p.390)

In spite of her worries, troubles and lack of encouragement from relatives, she is prepared to face all difficulties and write poetry:

Today
I won't care
For anybody's criticism
I'll flow
Like the current of a river
I'll brave all storms
smilingly
For the pleasure
of writing poetry.

(Ibid, p.391)

'Durgatāra Prathama Patra' depicts the wretched life of Suna, a newly married woman who has left her village recently after getting married. The poem itself is a letter addressed to her mother .In this letter the daughter narrates her woes. She is suffering a lot at her mother-in-law's house. The mother-in-law is ever angry with her. The brother-in-law is always livid with

rage; the sister-in-law pulls a wry face and it is better not to speak anything about the father-in-law. To add to her woes the widowed maidservant happens to be irritable and uses harsh words. The daughter also writes about the bad financial condition of the family to which she has been wedded. Sunā's husband is a clerk; the salary he earns is not sufficient to meet the monthly expenses of the family. The family doesn't own any landed property. The money her husband earns is spent on buying rice, pulses, fuel wood and water. Because of wants and lack of affection her life has become miserable.

What is significant here is that the poet has depicted the married life of a village girl with complete and objective honesty. The details given in the poem are conerete and verifiable. There is no sweeping generalization nor is there the artist's individual interpretation of experience.

In 'Matira Manisha' the poet describes the life of the poor farmer who feeds others by dint of hard labour but who himself is starved. He is an embodiment of poverty. He is emaciated and skinny. His hut is dilapidated and his child is sick. Expressing sympathy for the farmer the poet writes:

The one who sacrifices his life
Like a burning lamp
For the good of the world
Bears all misfortune and sorrow
And stands before the world
Weak and emaciated
Looking like a skeleton.

('Matira Manisha' *Sanchayana, BPG,* Part I, p.409)

'Chhuti Pharamas' describes the several demands of the family members of a low paid employee who is unable to satisfy those demands. Unable to fulfill the demands of her loving sister, wife and mother the employee cancels his visit to his native place during the summer vacation

'Bidhā Upare Bidhā' is a pathetic poem that gives a grim picture of the problem ridden family life of a lower middle class man. His body is weak and he looks like a living corpse. He has no rest, he is half starved. His desires are never fulfilled. There is no end to his worries. He has to work hard at the office. The demands of his children go on multiplying. He has to repay the

loan he has incurred. The wife is harsh in her dealings. He is unable to sleep at night because he has not yet been able to find out a suitable groom for his matured daughter. He has sacrificed his comforts for the happiness of others in the family. In a satirical vein Bidyut Prabha has written about the real experience of the head of a family:

Only when one forgets oneself
One manages smoothly
The affairs of one's family
His subjects — the family members
Pay him great respect
They breathe freely
And live happily and peacefully
Besides, one hears sweet bravos
From one's beloved wife.

('Bidhā Upare Bidhā', *Gadya Kavita, BPG,* Part-I, p.348)

The poem such as 'Bismaya', 'Bidhabā', 'Rickshawalla' and 'Kalikata Kuli' portray grim pictures of poverty, sorrow, suffering and agony. 'Bismaya' describes an unnatural death. Although the assault of nature is the immediate cause of death the real reason is poverty. In the poem the prevailing economic disparity among people is brought to the fore. Poverty, starvation and hard work have made Nathia prematurely old. This old looking young man Nathia had gone out braving rain, lightning and storm to bring medicinal diet for his old and sick father. On the way back he was struck by lightning and died. The poet's profuse sympathy for poor Nathia is revealed in the following lines:

On his death
No obituary came out
In the newspapers of the country
Nobody's eyes were wet
with tears.
Days passed by
One after another
Nobody built a tomb
On the *Benā* covered marshy ground
of the village
in poor Nathia's memory.

('Bismaya', *Gadya Kavita, BPG.* PartI, p.539-40)

The poet has drawn a pathetic picture of the widow in her poem, 'Bidhabā'. The widow searches vainly for her lost love. Her lips are pale. Her glance is pathetic and gait is slow. Her agony is more infinite than the sky, deeper than the sea and greater than the earth. The people treat her as an evil omen. The life of the widow has been described through an interesting metaphor: She is a long preface written in many pages to the huge book of the world full of sorrows and sufferings ('Bidhaba', *Bandanika, BPG.*,Part I, p.267)

Everybody has rightful claim to live like a human being on this earth. But some people have to live a life of deprivation. In 'Tume ta Manisha, Ame bi Manisha Bhai' the poet contrasts the lives of the rich who roll in luxury and those of the poor who are denied the basic necessities of life. She highlights the difference between their living standards. Though, no voice of revolt is heard in the poem, in the end, she is hopeful that the difference will soon disappear. She hears the beating of the drum of victory of the poor in all directions of the world proclaiming the equality of all human beings.

The little revolutionary fervour that was implicit in this poem becomes explicit to some extent in the poem, 'Rickshawalla'. The rickshaw puller is poor and deprived. His sad plight, the neglect suffered by him and the patronizing tone of voice of the rich are unbearable for him. Sweating his blood out with hard labour he has become weak and emaciated. His condition is very well described in the following lines:

Like a beast of burden
The rickshaw puller, silently, moves on.
With thorough intoxication,
His eyes are half-closed
and half-open.
Being urged by the gentleman
To move faster
His uneducated and rustic mind was dreaming
a fiery dream of revolution.

('Rickshawalla', *Bandanika, BPG.* Part I, p.240)

In this poem the poet's heart flows with sympathy for the rickshaw puller who suffers neglect and insult in day-to-day life.

'Kalikata Kuli' gives a moving picture of the family of an

Oriya farmer that has been ruined after the farmer left his family occupation and went to Calcutta to work as a coolie. His family members are starving, his granary of seven generations has become empty and the lowing of cows at evening is no more heard in his cowshed. His little son is bedridden with fever and his wife has no money to pay as fee to the physician. The poet urges the farmer working as a coolie in Calcutta to come back home and take care of his family and landed property. A very lively, realistic and pathetic picture is drawn in another poem entitled 'Kuli':

The poor and hapless coolie
Carries heavy burdens on his head
Being ever intoxicated with wine
He forgets all his sorrows.

('Kuli', *Marichika*, *BPG*, Part-I, p.150)

Although Bidyut Prabha's depiction of reality is mostly related to domestic life and rural life, nevertheless, it is a valuable aspect of her poetry. Some of these poems depicting such realities are very powerful and moving. Though Bidyut Prabha was primarily a romantic poet she didn't want to escape from reality and fly on the wings of imagination. The very earth she inhabited, the grim realities of both family life and social life attracted her attention. The realistic strain found in her poetry was the result of the inspiration she had got from the progressive poets of Orissa. But as a poet she was nearer to the humanist poets like Godabarisha Mohapatra, Mayadhar Mansingh, Radhamohan Gadanayak and Krushna Chandra Tripathy than to the progressive poets such as Ananta Pattanayak, Manamohan Mishra, Sachidananda Rautroy and Raghunath Das. That is why one finds in her poems not a strong revolutionary fervour but humanitarian sympathy for human beings. Again her realistic poems combine humanitarian sympathy with the spirit of idealism.

Thus, Bidyut Prabha's love and sympathy reach out to the helpless, poor, and unfortunate and physically challenged people of the world. She depicts the sorrows and sufferings, hopes and frustrations of widowed women and unfortunate village maidens who lose all possibilities of life at the cruel hands of fate and suffer premature death. They have to tolerate all oppressions in the name of religion, custom and social codes of conduct. Their

only solace is to shed silent tears. A pathetic note is struck in 'Shiuli Pade Jhari' and 'Dheu Smruti' where two village maidens end their lives being afflicted with humiliation and deceit. Their only fault is that they dream of love. Society, with its harsh code of conduct, castigates them. In fact, these two poems are two pathetic human documents of failed love.

The restrained but agreeable depiction of emotions and feelings, the pathetic tone and simple, moving language of these two bear the stamp of the poet's rare genius. In 'Dheu Smruti' she employs pathetic fallacy. When sympathy for the girl is not forthcoming from human quarters it comes from nature. The poet ascribes human capabilities, sensations and emotions to inanimate natural objects who sympathize with the girl while she commits suicide by jumping into the overflowing river:

Staring at the village maiden
In the dark and deep waters,
The violent waves
looked at one another.
Being stunned
The lightning glanced at the clouds,
The wind blew hard
sounding a cry of distress.
The Heaven and the Earth
Whispered at each other's ears
deliberating on this death.
Many a year has passed
Since the occurrence of the incident
Today, the waves dash against the shore,
singing the sad tale of her life.

('Dheu Smruti', *Marichika*, *BPG.*, Part-I, p.168)

Lack of human concern and sympathy for fellow human beings is again highlighted in 'Rickshawalla'. Here also nature comes forward to sympathize with the rickshaw-puller at his sad plight:

With a tone of distress
The falling rain was whispering
At the ears of the tree
'Why does the strong
Oppress the weak like this?'

That day the storm was voicing
The agony of millions of oppressed people
And the same was recorded
in the history of *Shravana*.

('Rickshawalla', *Bandanika*, *BPG*, Part-I, p.244)

In his preface to Bidyut Prabha's collection of poems, *Bandanika* Kunjabihari Dash rightly observed:

The poet has shed tears of affection for the sad and unhappy widowed sister. The suffering of the rickshaw-puller has overwhelmed her. Millions of poor, sick and oppressed people have struck a pathetic note in her heart. There (in those poems) the poet, instead of being an admirer of nature, has become a worshipper of humanity. For her darkness has become more significant than light because it is darkness which gives shelter to millions of unfortunate souls on its specious bosom. Tears have become more important than laughter because tears alone provide a channel to the sorrows and sufferings of the poor and distressed people.

(Preface to *Bandanika*, *BPG*, Part-I, p. 232)

Most of the poems included in *Marichika*, some of which we have already discussed, deal with the darker aspects of life. There life is treated as a mirage or an illusion where man's hopes are not fulfilled. Sorrows and sufferings rather than happiness and joy are the facts of life. These poems had elicited the following comments from Radhamohan Gadanayak:

[In these poems] the poet has not indulged in luxury and pleasures provided by the world. Rather, she has been overwhelmed by sympathy towards others. Her heart has been moved by the sorrows, sufferings, wants, regrets and tears of the world. Hence in the very first poem she has put forth her mental distress before God. Showing no fascination for Heaven she has looked downward to the earth, nature and the world of human beings.

(Preface to *Marichika*, *BPG*, Part-I, p. 135)

Bidyut Prabha is a poet of the countryside. The lovely, fascinating verdant hamlet had lasting impact on her. The city with its squalor, dirt and smoke didn't attract her. In 'Palli O Nagar' she contrasts the beauty of the hamlet with the ugliness of the city:

On that side
Curls of smoke billow
From chimneys
Of plants and factories
On this side
The bird sings
In the arbour.
On that side are seen
The muddy drains
Of city roads
On this side I see
My verdant hamlet
charming and beautiful.
('Palli O Nagara', *Marichika*, *BPG*, Part-I, p.178)

Since the beauty of the countryside had great attraction for her she has portrayed its beautiful scenes and sights in poems such as 'Kuãnra Punian', 'Barshārāga', 'Hemanta Laxmi', 'Pushpasabhā', 'Chaitree', 'Sharata', 'Sandhyashree', 'Jyotsnā Bihara', 'Ushā' etc.

Bidyut Prabha depicts not only the natural scenes of the countryside but also country life. The poems in *Kanakanjali* describe both the country scenes and the country life. Several festivals such as Raja, Manabasa, Dipabali, Prathamastami and Kumara Purnima have been lively portrayed. Along with those the rains, rivers, ponds, gods and goddesses, the young maidens and newly married women have also become the stuff of her poetry. The poet delineates the fascinating beauty of the morning and the evening, the light and the darkness of the countryside. But at the same time she also presents beautifully the deep feelings and emotions of the village folk. For example, in 'Raja Kamei' she shows how a mother is choked with emotion while arranging the customary gifts to be sent to her recently married daughter's house on the occasion of the Raja festival. Tears stream ceaselessly from her eyes. Summoning the village barber who is to carry the gifts she tells in an emotion-choked voice that her darling daughter would be eagerly waiting for the arrival of the barber on that day. ('Raja Kamei', *Kanakanjali*, *BPG*, Part I, p.99).

In 'Bidambana' the love and affection between a brother and

a sister of a hamlet has been beautifully painted. The sister who is younger than the brother follows him wherever he goes. Being small children they build many a house of sand. Their affection for each other is pure and heavenly. The poet compares them with two smiling flowers on a single stalk. They are pure like the two sacred rivers Ganga and Yamuna. While playing with dust the two innocent children pick up small quarrels with each other. When the brother cries over something the sister's face becomes stained with tears. They grow up into young men and women. The sister got married during the absence of the brother. The sister wrote letters to her brother inviting him to go to her house. But the pity is that the brother could not visit her place due to his poverty. He recollected the happy memories of childhood when he and his sister were playing together and was severely hurt by those memories.

Commenting on such poems Mayadhar Mansingh, a noted poet and critic wrote: 'The poet has a sympathetic heart as well as interest and imagination to preserve whatever is beautiful, sweet and charming in her harsh environment' (Opinion on *Kanakanjali*, *BPG*,Part-I p.91).

Bidyut Prabha's senses are ever alert to natural scenes and sights. Her imagination and insight add colour and charm to the objects of nature. Sometimes she personifies them by endowing life, human attributes and feelings:

Like one's own obstinate child
The spear grass sticks
To the corner of one's cloth
On the earth
The *Magushira*-maiden smiles
Smearing her golden body
with wild turmeric paste.

('Palli Pathe', *Bandanika*, *BPG*,Part I,p.249)

Her aesthetic sense, imaginative insight and descriptive talent come to the fore in poems such as 'Jyotsna Bihara' and 'Sandhayashree'. In 'Jyotsna Bihara' the poet writes:

On either side of the river
The trees stand like sentinels
The sound of flute
Coming from afar

Enchants the soul
Under the canopy of moon light
In the clean water of the river
The foamy ripples dance
In harmony with the tune
Pushing against those ripples
My boat moves swiftly ahead.
('Jyotsna Bihara' *Bandanika, BPG,* Part I, p.273)

While describing the beauty of the evening in 'Sandhyashree' she observes: 'Oozing beauty and charm two stars are smiling at each other'. This is a lively description of the beauty of nature. Bidyut Prabha observes nature, contemplates over its beauty and portrays the same attractively. Thus we get images such as 'the last rays of the setting sun leaving the imprint of kisses on the face of the lotus sitting in meditation' and 'the stationary evening star looking intermittently at its face in the clean water of the pond with curiosity'. ('Sandhyashree' *Bandanika*, *BPG*,Part I, p.269).

Bidyut Prabha has written some religious poems. All the poems included in *Bhaktimalya* show her love and devotion for God. In these divine lyrics the poet sings the glory of the Lord; prays Him and seeks His compassion, blessings and guidance to serve humanity. These compositions show that Bidyut Prabha is not only a devotee and worshipper of God but also of truth, bliss and beauty. She thinks God wants us to serve humanity. This is clearly stated in 'Bhakta O Bhagaban', the very first poem of *Bhaktimalya*:

The devotee asked God:
'Lord! Tell me
What can I do for you
to reciprocate
so much of your compassion?'
The Lord said:
'Can you wipe the tears
From the tired eyes
Of millions of hungry and sick people
Reduced to skeletons?'

(*BPG*, Part I, p. 509)

The poet cannot think of life without God. In 'Tuma Bina' she

says that God's compassion has made her courageous and God is her greatest strength. She feels that without God's help and support the heaven like earth would be a fearful desert. 'Tumaku Chhadile' gives the idea that without God life is futile and one's life becomes fruitful if one firmly believes in God. In 'Dwandwa' she wishes the divine light to illuminate her path of life. She prays God to remove the darkness from her life and carry her on the chariot of salvation to the divine abode.

All the poems of *Bhaktimalya* are inspired by pious and noble sentiments. She invokes God to give her power and strength to tread on the path of truth and righteousness. She wants to be free from envy, deceit, pride and selfishness. She desires to be poor so that she could realize the suffering of the poor people. Her life would be fruitful if she could wipe tears from the eyes of those who suffer. If her life is sacrificed for the good of the world she would think God's mercy has been available to her. In the poem, 'Minati' she prays God to make her a small earthen lamp. Like the burning flame of the lamp consuming itself to give light to others she would sacrifice her life in the service of humanity.

'Tume' is a paean of praise for God and His creation. God is infinitely beautiful, sweet, pure, serene, swift and great and so is His creation. Compared to God man is quite insignificant. God's creation is mysterious. Nobody can understand the mystery of His creation except Himself. Hence she writes:

You are great like a mountain
I'm small like a particle of dust
I'm finite in this infinite world.
I'm a meagre drop of water
In the mysterious ocean of creation.
This much I'll say:
You are blissful
You possess a million qualities
Who else, besides yourself, knows
the mystery of your creation?

Bidyut Prabha doesn't believe in the rituals associated with religion. Hence in 'Bhala Pāa Jebe Maté', she prays to the Lord not to tie her to formal muttering of prayers, meditation, offerings, worship and reading of religious scriptures. But then she is deeply religious at heart. She has felt the compassion of

the Lord during her suffering and distress. Her firm faith in God has sustained her life:

I know my friend, I know
I have felt your compassion
In my heart
During suffering and distress.
I don't meditate
But I know that you exist
And this faith, Oh Lord,
sustains my life.

('Anunaya', *Bhaktimalya, BPG*, p. 523)

Thus, Bidyut Prabha's religious poems show her firm faith in God. These are songs of praise for the Lord but nowhere does she pray God for the fulfillment of material desires. She seeks divine mercy to tread the path of truth, righteousness and service. She completely surrenders before God and supplicates Him to illuminate her path of life and help her in achieving salvation. These divine poems are a repository of devotional feelings and spiritual values.

Some of her poems reveal her philosophical attitude to life. The poems such as 'Jeebana Chakra', 'Dhuli', 'Mashani Smruti', 'Dūrbā', 'Antima Prashna', 'Shrustira Baichitrya' and 'Kabira Bhagabana' included in the collection *Marichika* show the poet's deep philosophical thoughts. Like William Shakespeare's 'All the World's a Stage', Bidyut Prabha's 'Jeevana Chakra' depicts the different stages in the cycle of life comprising of infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth and old age. Bidyut Prabha's poem, being lyrical, appeals both to the head and the heart. Describing the arrival of youth and its influence on her the poet writes:

Looking like Cupid
Charming Youth stood before me
Holding offerings of love
Of moonlit nights
Sweet and intoxicating
And in the twinkling of an eye
Made me wild
Like the swollen river
In the month of *Shrabana*

('Jeevana Chakra', *Marichika, BPG*, Part I, p.147)

In 'Dhūli' the poet philosophizes about dust. Although the particle of dust is the smallest entity in the world it is not jealous of others. It feels pain when all creatures tread on it but it tolerates the pain without any grumbling. It knows all will ultimately turn to dust. It is poor, it has no support but it can withstand all pressures. From the day of creation it has been observing all activities that are ultimately vain.

'Shrustira Baichitrya' shows the dualities in God's universe. Creation is always followed by destruction. The beautiful lotus grows on ooze inside the pond. The black bird cuckoo, ugly in appearance, sings in a melodious voice. The golden lightning appears on the body of collyrium black clouds. Happiness and sorrow coexist in this world. Birth is inevitably followed by death. Old age is inherent in youth. The bright full moon day is followed by the dark new moon day. The poet thinks that, with her limited intelligence, she cannot unravel this mystery of God's creation. She bows repeatedly at the feet of the Lord for these dualities in His creation.

In some poems of *Bandanika* one also notices the poet's philosophical attitude to life and the world. For example, in 'Naree O Nara' she shows how the man and the woman complement each other. God has paired them. Like body and soul they are closely linked to each other. If man is the lamp, the woman is its flame, if man is the brush the woman is the paint. Similarly if man is like the ocean, the woman is like the wave. If one is the flute the other is its musical note. When man becomes restless woman gives him comfort with her soothing words.

Giving further images the poet says if man is the idea woman is its essence. If one is incense the other is its fragrance. Then she compares man with a song and a poem and woman with the tone of the song and rhythm of the poem. The poet feels that the world has been bright and glorious throughout the Ages because of the union of man and woman.

Although Bidyut Prabha is chiefly a lyric poet she has written a few ballads. Traditionally ballads were songs transmitted orally, which told stories. Those were narrative species of folk songs. Typically popular ballads were dramatic, condensed, and impersonal. Many ballads employed set formulas including stock descriptive phases, a refrain in each stanza and incremental

repetition in which a line or stanza is repeated but with an addition that advanced the story. The traditional ballad had engendered the literary ballad which is a narrative poem written in deliberate imitation of the form, language, and spirit of the traditional ballad. In it there may be a first-person teller of the story or it may have an impersonal third-person narrator.

Bidyut Prabha has written six literary ballads, namely 'Shakuntalā Bidaya', 'Jugala Ālapa', 'Yakshabadhura Anuchinta', 'Nirbana Pathé', 'Jeevana Bhiksha' and 'Ghāsara Kabara'. These ballads are based on mythological and historical incidents. 'Shakuntalā Bidaya' depicts an incident of the *Mahabharata*, that of Shakuntalā's departure from the hermitage of sage Kanwa, her foster father while going to her husband Dushyanta, the king of Hastinapur. As per the demands of the theme, the description is bound to be sentimental. But what is more significant about the ballad is the deft use of pathetic fallacy. The poet has ascribed human capabilities, sensations and emotions to inanimate natural objects. The trees in sage Kanwa's Ashram, the river Mālini and even the dust of her trodden path feel the pangs of separation from Shakuntalā and they express their sadness through action, words and gestures. When Shakuntalā says goodbye to the trees she had reared with her own hands they shed tears. At the time of her departure flowers shed pollen grains on Shakuntalā's head and the bumble-bee starts humming. The poet imagines that the pollen grains are auspicious rice thrown on Shakuntalā's head and the humming of the bumblebee is the sound of conch blown on this auspicious occasion.

'Jugala Ālapa' is a moral discourse on ideal living. Here sage Abadhuta is imparting the moral lessons to king Jadu on the latter's asking. The theme is taken from *Bhagabata*. Abadhuta had no attachment for anything in the world. His life was solely dedicated to God. He told the king about his *gurus* (preceptors) who had taught him those lessons. He had sixty-four gurus including a hunter, an angler, a heron, a kite holding a fish on its beak and a bumblebee. This ballad teaches lessons on moral values such as concentration, attentiveness, meditation, killing of desire, and the futility of hoarded treasure.

The theme of 'Yakshabadhura Anuchinta' is borrowed from Kalidas's *Meghaduttam*. The poem expresses the pangs of

separation of the Yaksha's wife from her husband who has been exiled from heaven because of a curse. It also reveals her thoughts about her husband and her eager waiting for their reunion. The poet gives a moving description of her pining for the husband:

In this sweet spring
The melodious voice of the cuckoo
Engenders a hundred griefs in me
My body is shaken
By the vernal breeze
Blowing around me
Still, oh my Love!
Making a stone of my heart
I count the days
After which the curse will end
And happiness prevail
In this house
Then-
Oh, my master!
I'll fructify my life
By holding you close
to my bosom.

('Yakshabadhura Anuchinta,' *Gatha, BPG*, Part I, p.473)

'Nirvana Pathé' describes Buddha's renunciation of the world for finding the means of salvation. On his way he meets Chhandaka, the stable keeper who dissuades him from going away leaving the comforts and luxuries of the palace. Buddha tells Chhandaka about the transitoriness of worldly life beset with disease, old age, sorrow and death. He prevails on Chhandaka not to obstruct his way and went ahead hearing the call of salvation from afar. And 'Jeevan Bhikshā' describes an incident in the life of Buddha after he had received the 'enlightenment'. A mother who has recently lost her son comes to Buddha and prays him to bring her son back to life. Buddha removes the mother's ignorance and worldly illusions and teaches her about the inevitability of death in the mortal world.

Bidyut Prabha's last ballad, 'Ghāsara Kabara' narrates the greatness of Jāhānnārā, the beautiful daughter of Shāhājāhān, the Mogul emperor. She has given up everything to serve her father

who was imprisoned by his son Aurangzeb. She has realized the futility of wealth, power and glory that make one mean and inhuman. Before her death she has wished for a humble burial under an earthen grave covered with grass. She doesn't want a beautiful marble monument to be raised on the place of her burial.

Bidyut Prabha's ballads are modern literary ballads based on old mythological and historical themes. These are short narrative song- poems. Simple in plot; these ballads describe single, dramatic incidents in a form suitable for singing or rhythmical chanting. But the old set formulas such as stock descriptive phrases; refrain and incremental repetition have not been used in these poems.

The poet has fifty six small poems written in one stanza, two stanzas or at best three stanzas. Those have been included in the collection *Khadyotika*. Those small poems, packed with ideas, are highly instructive. They are descriptive, musical and their language is felicitous. The poem, 'Phula' may be cited here as an example:

The flower is born
Only to serve the universe
Its beauty is indescribable
Though it lives for a while
Its life is successful
Its face indicates
The feeling of its heart
It's a sweet but momentary dream
Of the Creator.

('Phula', *Khadyotika, BPG.*, Part I, p.494)

Bidyut Prabha had very good knowledge of prosody. She had used different types of verse forms and poetic meters. In an essay, 'Muktakshara Chhanda O Upadha' published in *Kumkum* (Vol. II, 1st issue, October 1949, p.39) she has shown the difference between *Akshara Matrika* meter and *Dhwani Matrika* or *Yuktakshara* meter and between *Mitrakshara* and *Amitrakshara* meters. She has also explained *Upadha* in the same essay.

She has explained that a meter regulated by the number of letters it contains is called *Akshara Matrika* and the one regulated by the number of prosodic instants it contains is called *Dhwani Matrika* or *Yuktakshara* meter. In two corresponding lines of a

stanza if the last letter of one line is the same with the last letter of the other then the meter is called *Mitrakshara*, if the letters are different then the meter is called *Amitrakshara*. *Mitrakshara* meter is of two types, namely, *Purna Mitrakshara Chhanda* and *Apurna Mitrakshara Chhanda*. If the last letter and the vowel sound of the penultimate letter of one line are same with those of the other line then the meter is *Purna Mitrakshara* and if the two letters are same and the vowel sounds of the penultimate letters are different then the meter is *Apurna Mitrakshara*. The vowel of the penultimate letter is called *Upadha*. A poem written in *Purna Mitrakshara* meter is pleasing to hear.

Although Bidyut Prabha has used all the meters mentioned above she has flawlessly employed *Matrika Chhanda* in most of her poems. She has also experimented with free verse as in some of the poems included in *Gadya Kavita*. She has entitled the collection *Gadya Kavita* that means prose poems. These prose poems are densely compact, pronouncedly rhythmic and highly sonorous compositions. After writing some prose poems she has again come back to writing metrical verses.

Bidyut Prabha's poetic powers seem to have waned after 1956. This decline has been attributed to some terrible mental agony. But her creativity didn't come to an end after 1956. She wrote a lot of spiritual and devotional poems as well as children's poetry during the second phase of her poetic career beginning from 1957. Though the poems written during this phase lack the beauty and charm of the previous poems they have their own beauty and attraction. They also show a kind of growth of the poet's mind. After becoming a mother she has naturally been attracted towards children and written poems for them. And after becoming a devotee of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo she has been inspired to write spiritual and devotional poems.

Her spiritual and devotional poems have been included in three anthologies, namely, *Pushpanjali*(1967), *Jyotishikha*(1973), and *Suryamukhee*(1973). The poems of *Pushpanjali* and *Suryamukhee* are invocations to the Mother and those sing the glory of the divine mother. In these poems the poet seeks the Mother's blessings. The poems of *Jyotishikha* describe the sacred shrine of Pondichery, its environment, institutions and activities.

Pushpanjali is a collection of twenty-eight poems. The poems are numbered and they have no titles. The collection is dedicated to the Mother. The poems are written in the form of prayers in which the poet prays the Mother to give her the light of truth, delight, love, knowledge and strength. Abandoning all vanity and all material possessions she surrenders before the mother and asks for her love. She earnestly requests her to cool her burning heart by sprinkling the water of love. Since she has nothing to give in return she would offer only her self to the Mother (Poem-XV).

Coming to the path of Yoga the poet has come to realize that the Mother alone won't deceive her. Hence she surrenders herself completely before the Mother:

Coming to the path of Yoga
I realize
You alone won't deceive me
Now I know
You are the be-all and end-all
Of my existence
Nothing else matters to me
Take everything you have given
Including myself
For those belong to you.

(Poem-X, *Pushpanjali, BPG*, Part II, p.15)

No doubt, when an artist completely sheds his/her ego the quality of his/her works would suffer. This has happened in case of Bidyut Prabha during the second phase of her poetic career. The sensuous apprehension of beauty and tender poetic feelings have disappeared from her and her mind has been preoccupied with moral and spiritual thought. After surrendering herself completely at the feet of the Mother she has become increasingly concerned with divine thought and supra-mental consciousness.

She expresses regret that people run after riches, knowledge and fame. They do not have time to think of God. To her mind people striving for material achievements are always discontented where as people who concentrate on God are contented and their contentment is reflected on their faces. She asserts that love of God is the best thing in the world and all other things are insubstantial like a line drawn on water (Poem-XII, *Pushpanjali, BPG*, Part II, p.17).

The poet believed that someday supra-mental consciousness would descend into the life of man. This belief was strengthened in her mind during her stay at Pondichery for a long time. About this belief she was written:

The light of supra-mental consciousness
Flows in the sky
In wind and water
In skyscrapers and mud huts
The earth worships that light
Silently
Then why should we blame fate
And lament unnecessarily
Bowing our heads with sorrow?

(Poem-VIII, *Puspanjali*, *BPG*, Part-II, p.13)

This belief has become so strong that the poet is quite optimistic about a great transformation in the human world. She thinks, with the descent of supra-mental consciousness, a new race of human beings will appear on the earth and the earth will be converted into heaven:

A new race of super human beings
Will appear in the human world
The clayey earth will be transformed
Into heaven
And there will prevail
Eternal peace and happiness.

(Poem-XVII, *Puspanjali*, *BPG*, Part-II, p.22)

Pondichery is a great shrine and a place of pilgrimage for the devotees of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The divine light of the Mother encircles it. This land of peace and joy is a heaven on earth. The poet sings the glory of this place in 'Pondichery', the very first poem of *Jyotishikha*:

Pondichery is the glory of the world
It's the pride of India
It's the holiest of the holy places
It's comparable
With itself alone
This Pondichery is the jewel
in the crown of the world.

('Pondichery', *Jyotishikha*, *BPG*, Part-II, p.43)

'Ashramu Bidaya' depicts the poet's grief while leaving Sri Aurobindo Ashrama. She feels that the Ashram is the place of her birth and her actual native land Orissa is alien to her. While coming to Orissa she feels that her soul has been pledged to the great grave (*Maha Samadhi*) of Sri Aurobindo at Pondichery. All the devotees are the Mother's children and they constitute a very large family. Nobody wants to be separated from it. She invokes the Mother to break her worldly ties. She wishes the Mother's divine smile would support and guide her on the path of life, which is full of complexities.

In 'Nutana Barsha Nutana Pravata' the poet prays to God to remove the darkness of ignorance from her heart and give her the light of knowledge. She prays Him to make her a flower so that she would give delight and fragrance to others without accepting anything in return. She wants God to reduce the distance not between them but between Him and all human beings. Such sympathy and concern for humanity were noticed previously in the Oriya saint poet, Bhima Bhoi who had said: 'Let me suffer in hell but let the world be saved.'

The silence around the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo has been personified in 'Mahasamadhi'. Sitting in deep meditation like a great sage Silence is dreaming of the kingdom of truth. In 'Sebataru', the tree inspires the devotees to convert all their physical activities to love and service. In 'Arobhila', Auroville is described as the new city created for leading a new life. This celestial city is the glory of the world. Its soil, sky and wind always sing its sacred hymns. The poet wants to mingle her identity with that of Auroville, the brainchild of Aurobindo, the great soul. Becoming an Aurovillean she will be free from the deadening impact of worldly life and achieve immortality.

In 'Samudra O Samadhi' she experiences the pull and hears the call of the sea and the great tomb of Aurobindo simultaneously at Pondichery. The blue waters of the sea and the peaceful atmosphere of the grave precincts are equally attractive. The beauty of the sea during the glorious sunset removes the inertia from her soul while the grave illuminates it. While she hears the song of the waves through her ears, she listens to the great silence of the grave in her soul. Then she says that the great grave and the great sea are the light and voice of the soul respectively.

Bidyut Prabha's spiritual experiences and her love and devotion for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have become very strong in the poems of *Suryamukhee*. The title *Suryamukhee* is quite suggestive. The sunflower blossoms receiving light from the sun, the poet's soul has blossomed receiving divine mercy from the Mother.

In the poems of this collection the poet expresses her love, devotion and gratitude to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. She also prays the Mother earnestly to illuminate her heart and make her spiritually conscious. In 'Krupa O Nirbana' she expresses her heartfelt gratitude to the Mother for her mercy, support, benediction and guidance:

Mother-
You guided me
On the beautiful path
Bearing the foot-prints
of eternal spring.
Had I not received
Your compassion,
Would I be anxious
for you?
Mother-
You saved me
From the hot desert
With the cool waters
Of the Ganges;
Rescuing me from the path
Covered with hot lava
Of living volcanoes
You drove me
On the bright chariot
of rain-laden clouds.

('Krupa O Nirvara', *Suryamukhee*, *BPG*, Part-II, p.88)

The poet's faith in the Mother and dependence on her is complete and it is clearly revealed in 'Tume Mo Māā'. The Mother always responds to her call and fulfills all her needs even without asking. She gives comfort by stroking the poet's face and body when she is lying in sick-bed. She gives hope when the poet's face turns pale out of despair. Wherever the poet looks she finds the Mother and the Mother is the only refuge for her.

Man leads a miserable life because of his desires and attachments, lack of faith in God and his loss of other values such as sincerity, devotion, dedication, love, sympathy and surrender. But the poet is optimistic that Mother's compassion will be available and man will abandon the evil path and his miseries will end ('Dwaita Leela', *Suryamukhee, BPG.* Part II, p.97-98) Man shouldn't lament over his miseries and misfortunes. The poet thinks that the Mother of the Universe has incarnated herself in the form of Sri Ma to wipe the tears of human beings on this earth ('Nabajyoti', *Suryamukhee, BPG*, Part II, p.104).

Thus, Bidyut Prabha's spiritual and devotional poems depict her own spiritual experiences and devotion to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. With her spiritual insight she has seen a new light, that of divine truth which will remove the darkness of ignorance from the world. She asks all human beings to sing the glory of the Creator and make their lives divine through wisdom, love and meditation ('Naba Prakasha', *Jyotishikha, BPG*, Part II, pp. 64-65).

In the latter part of her poetic career Bidyut Prabha wrote a number of poems for children. These poems are delightful, instructive and educative at the same time. These poems have been included in the collections such as *Mati Pani Pabana*(1973), *Jahaku Jie*(1956), *Mo Penkali Bajei De*(1960), *Gachha-Patara*(1961), *Mu Kemiti Pila*(1961), *Kahinki Tume*(1963), *Padhutha Hasi Hasi Gadutha*(1966).

The poems of *Mati Pani Pabana* reveal Bidyut Prabha's philosophical attitude to earth, water and air. While explaining the close relationship of life with land, water and air in these poems she philosophizes about these three elements, speaks about their utility and establishes them as role models for human beings particularly for children and expresses her gratitude to God for giving us such invaluable things.

Mati Pani Pabana is by far the best among Bidyut Prabha's children's poetry collections. From the points of view of poetic emotion, philosophical contemplation, educational value and felicitous expression the collection is unique. Each of the thirty lyrics included in the collection clearly expresses the nature and significance of land, water or wind and things related to them. The collection is prefaced with two short poems written by the

poet. The first poem mentions the five elements such as earth, water, air, light and ether that have made human life possible. The second poem is philosophical. It hints at man's divine origin and his progress from mortality to immortality. The purpose of human life, though rooted in earth, is to grow spiritually and reach the ultimate goal of salvation. All the poems of this anthology inspire the readers particularly the children to transcend the attachments of this material world and strive for the spiritual world of truth, bliss and joy.

Observing the earth minutely Bidyut Prabha says that the earth tolerates everything and it gives its affection equally to one and all. Its sweet water and mild breeze give us strength and the fruits of its plants and creepers give us energy and contentment. The poet equates earth with the mother and praises her for all things she has given to man and for tolerating all his follies and blunders. Like the American poet Robert Frost who 'builds slowly from observation to symbolic meaning', Bidyut Prabha, while observing the earth ultimately makes it a symbol of sensitivity i.e. of perceptive feeling and sympathetic understanding ('Sarbamsaha Mati', *Mati Pani Pabana, BPG*, Part II, p.119).

Man and earth are closely related. Without earth man's existence on this planet would have been impossible. In the poem 'Manisha O Mati' she highlights the significance of earth in human life:

Earth is my friend
It's my father
And also my mother
It's my only support
During sorrow or joy
Sickness or health.

('Manisha O Mati', *Mati Pani Pabana, BPG*, Part II, p.129)

The burning earthen lamp lives as long as its wick burns. Since its life span is short it joins its soul-flame with the light of the supreme soul. It renders service to others by giving light and never forgets God:

Never do I forget to serve
Nor do I forget the name of God

Immersing always in the dark
I give light to others.

('Matideepa', *Mati Pani Pabana, BPG*, Part II, p.124)

Man's life is transitory like that of the burning lamp. Like the lamp communing with the divine light through its burning flame and serving others by giving light man should commune with God in prayer and render service to others during his short stay in the world. The poet, here, has symbolically identified the burning wick of the lamp with the perishable human body and the flame of the lamp with the immortal human soul longing for union with the supreme soul.

Nature and the natural elements were constant sources of attraction for the poet. They stirred the poet's imagination. Each poem of the collection, *Mati Pani Pabana* bears testimony to this fact. In the poem 'Pushkarini' the poet imagines the quiet pond as the sleeping princess of water. The hundred lilies that have blossomed in the pond are her eyes. This princess of water glances at others with her hundred lily-eyes. Over the pond the mild wind sings songs and the blue lilies invite the sun to come near them. The golden rays of the sun peep through the water and see the lotus-bride adorned with a necklace of pearls. While observing the beauty of nature the poet is lost in contemplation over the mystery of God's creation:

Mysterious is God's creation!
He made the lotus grow
On the ooze of the pond
And the pearl
Inside the shell
Of the lowly oyster.
In His opinion
Nothing is mean
Strange is His judgment
One cannot discover
A thread of His thought.
Though there are lakes,
Streams and rivers
The louts and the lily wallow
In the oozy waters
of the pond.

('Pushkarini', *Mati Pani Pabana, BPG*, Part II, p.144)

Nature provides us with pure joy and inspires us to sing the glory of God. Even the tide tells us:

Brothers!
We have come here
To experience joy
The world will be beautiful
When our lives are filled with joy
Making our lives joyful
We'll sing the glory of God.
('Juara', *Mati Pani Pabana, BPG*, Part II, p.150)

The poems in *Mati Pani Pabana* appear simple because those express child like thoughts and feelings in very simple language. But behind this apparent simplicity there lies a deep philosophical insight. Philosophy is associated with a new way of seeing things. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has said that philosophy is a new way of seeing beyond the horizons of time. When this seeing, which is a sudden growth in understanding occurs, our whole outlook on the world is transformed. Bidyut Prabha doesn't look at earth, water and air like the conventional writers. She has understood their real significance. So in a philosophical vein she has written:

When the rain falls in drops
The raindrop says:
Listen! My brothers and sisters
I have come here to give
And I have no desire
to take anything.
('Barasha Topā', *Mati Pani Pabana, BPG*, Part II, p.148)

In 'Pani Phutuka' she observes that we are like bubbles in the vast ocean of eternity. But how much we fight and boast while doing our work! In 'Paban' the air says that it treats the trees, animals, birds and human beings equally. It has equal love for all of them. It advises human beings not to be biased against anybody and there by hurt him. It cites the example of God who doesn't discriminate against anybody while giving his mercy ('Pabana', *Mati Pani Pabana, BPG*, Part-II, pp.157-158).

The poems included in Bidyut Prabha's other children's poetry anthologies such as *Jahaku Jie*, *Mo Penkali Bajei De*, *Gachha-Patara*, *Mu Kemiti Pila*, *Kahinki Tume*, and *Padhutha Hasi Hasi Gadutha* are quite instructive and delightful particularly for

children. Some of the lines in these poems are witty and proverbial. For example in 'Kathara Natha' she writes:

Amulya bachana Vedara gara
Sabu kale teka thaeti tara
('Kathara Natha' *Jahaku Jie*, *BPG*, Part II, p.181)

These two lines mean that valuable words are authoritative and infallible like the Vedas. Those are always held in high esteem. We may cite another example from the poem 'Garamāgarama':

Tulāti pari narama hoi jibi mu pachhe jali
Marama kāra podibi nāin garama nian bhali.
('Garamagaram' *Jahaku Jie*, *BPG*, Part II, p.184)

These lines would mean 'I will be soft like cotton. I may burn myself but I wont hurt anybody like burning fire.' The poems in *Mo Penkali Bajei De* are more entertaining than instructive. The beauty as well as the utility of leaves, plants and trees has been highlighted in the poems of *Gachha-Patara*. This anthology has been prefaced with a very simple but persuasive stanza in which the poet has written that plants and trees are like our parents. They sustain our life. We'll muster courage to live like them. The poems in *Mu Kemiti Pila* describe the qualities of an ideal child. *Kahinki Tume* contains poems on the various activities of the children and on some tricky questions meant for them. These poems also give some valuable messages and teach moral lessons to them. *Padhutha Hasi Hasi Gadutha* is a collection of humorous poems written for the entertainment of children. But those are instructive too. For example in a poem 'Mathuri Das' the poet has written:

Pāna bidi nuhen samanya nisha,
Jaṇā pade nāhin taṇe paisā.
('Mathuri Das' *Padhutha Hasi Hasi Gadutha* *BPG*, Part II, p.379)

Here, the poet means to say that taking betel and smoking *bidi* are not small intoxications. Imperceptibly they put a strain on one's purse. In the last two lines of the poem 'Agata Panchā' the poet says that all dreams of happiness are illusory like the sands in a mirage. Hence she advises children only to work without thinking of future happiness ('Agata Panchā', *Padhutha Hasi Hasi Gadutha BPG*, Part II, p.403).

Bidyut Prabha wrote a novelette entitled *Niswa Jagata*. The same was written during the period beginning from 5.2.1946 to

20.2.1946, a period of just sixteen days. The writer at that time was barely twenty. Maybe due to lack of experience and vision, which come with age, the work seems immature. It is sketchy and its characters are flat. The work is designed to be read at a single sitting and to produce a single, concentrated effect.

The novelette is prefaced with a poem supposed to introduce its theme. In the poem the writer asks God why He has made some people poor in this world. The poor man, being foolish and ignorant, doesn't understand God's purpose. Forgetting God he blames his fate and cries with distress.

The work elaborates the story of Nityananda Mohanty's family, the poverty inflicted upon Nityananda, his wife and son Nagen by the machinations of Adwaita, Nagen's younger brother and Gobinda Mishra, a villain who habitually causes dissention and brings about ruin and rupture to a family, and the role of fate and chance in the lives of the characters. To a great extent the plot and the narrative are modelled on Kalindi Charan Panigrahi's novel, *Matira Manisha* (*The Man of the Soil*). In Kalindi Charan's novel farmer Baraju, the elder brother leaves the house and the village leaving everything to Chhakadi, the younger brother because he won't allow a division of the parental property as demanded by the latter. Under similar circumstances, in *Niswa Jagata* the elder brother Nityananda leaves his house and village along with his wife and son giving every thing to his younger brother Adwaita and his wife. Gobinda Mishra of *Niswa Jagata* may be compared with Hari Mishra of *Matira Manisha* because both act as catalysts in ruining and rupturing two families.

Nityananda, on his way to Puri, accidentally meets a kind and helpful man Sitanath in the train. Sitanath who is the manager of Emar math arranges a job for Nityananda at Puri and thus Nityananda is able to eke out a living and save himself and his family from starvation. Now the immediate aim of Nityananda is to educate his only son Nagen and he acts accordingly. But ill-fated Nityananda meets with accidental death. A generous man named Kulamani takes pity on Nityananda's widow and her son Nagen. With his help Nagen becomes educated and gets a job.

In the meantime Nagen's uncle Adwaita loses all parental property. He ruins himself and his family and finally suffers from leprosy. The villagers hate him and his wife goes mad. Leaving

her husband behind she goes away from the village. Like Fakirmohan and Kanhu Charan, two major Oriya novelists, Bidyut Prabha has emphasized the role of fate in her novel.

The novelette thus narrates a simple story in a straightforward manner. The plot is simple, not intricate. The novelist organizes the events and actions relating to the family spanning over a period of forty years. She also gives us an account of village life packed with naturalistic details and vibrant with a profound emotional affinity.

Bidyut Prabha has not paid much attention to the fictional technique. The plot is not so well organized to achieve the particular emotional and artistic effects as have been suggested in the prefatory poem appended to he novelette. The ending asserts that the vast world comprises millions of poor people. But the significance of poverty has neither been explained nor has the special relationship between God and the poor people been established as suggested in the prefatory poem. Maybe the writer, while writing the novel, was too immature to handle such a theme and to use modern fictional techniques.

Bidyut Prabha also wrote a One-Act Play entitled *Bibaha* (*Marriage*). For sometime she was organizing Aurobindo *Pathachakras* and preaching Aurobindo's philosophy and ideals. During that period she had written this play. Although the play was written with a specific purpose it is powerful in conception and presentation. The real purpose of marriage has been explored in the play through intelligent and powerful dialogues. Bidyut Prabha was trying to explode the traditional myth of marriage, which treats the married woman as inferior to her husband and as an object of possession.

There are five characters in the play namely, Netibou (Neti's mother), Haribou (Hari's mother), Hari's wife, Hari and Neti. Netibou and Haribou are conservative women who are critical of Neti and Hari's wife for joining Aurobindo *Pathachakra*. They don't want women and young girls to go outside the house. Hari also has the traditional mind-set. He believes that man is born in this world to eat, drink and make merry and of course to lead a family life and the woman is born to cook food for the family and bear children.

Both his wife and Neti strongly oppose him and say that marriage helps in the growth and development of spiritual life.

Marriage becomes successful only when the husband treats his wife as his equal and both work together for spiritual development. Ultimately they succeed in convincing Hari, Netibou and Haribou about the utility.of *Pathachakras* for women and the real purpose of marriage.

In the play Bidyut Prabha has cited the Mother's views regarding marriage. According to the Mother the man and his wife complement each other in married life. They should share their emotions and intellect. By expanding their individual consciousness and joining it with the Universal consciousness they can achieve perfection in life. Together, they should strive for knowing the divine truth. To have similar desires, to grow with similar desires and to progress spiritually together are the key to a strong unbreakable union between a man and a woman ('*Bibaha*, *BPG*, Part II, pp. 497-498).

Drama was not Bidyut Prabha's forte. Realizing that it is a powerful medium to influence public opinion she wrote this One-Act Play highlighting her views on ideal marriage. She was confident that by shedding the conservative mind-set and by following the ideals of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, married life would be meaningful, charming and beautiful.

Conclusion

Bidyut Prabha died prematurely but left behind a body of memorable poems that still haunt and excite the discerning and sympathetic readers. She will be remembered as a poet who responded to the sorrows and joys of the world with great sensitivity and tenderness. She was a humanist with the eyes and ears of a true poet.

Though her formal education was limited, she educated herself at home. Much of her education came from sensuous apprehension of nature and from her emotional and intellectual responses to experience. She came from humble surroundings. Her father had brought stability to his family through struggle, perseverance and hard work. This hardship had taught her the virtues of humility and acceptance and made her modest, sweet and accommodating. Through self-study she became well versed in Oriya poetry and in her own writing stuck to that genre that is poetry. She started writing from early years and continued to write throughout, more prolifically after her marriage in 1949 till the last part of her life before her untimely death in 1977. She had about 25 volumes and some stray poems including collections for children and devotional and spiritual anthologies.

The most powerful and dominating aspect of Bidyut Prabha's poetry was her sensitivity to the beauties of rural nature as well as rural habits, manners, festivals and festivities. This was partly because a substantial part of her life was spent in villages on the banks of rivers both before and after marriage, both in childhood days as well as in adult life, a large part of which she could absorb in her personality and attitudes. Another reason for this sensitivity was that she knew pure and elementary feelings exist in the state of simplicity of country life than in the sophisticated life of the city.

After her marriage Bidyut Prabha received from her spouse a great deal of support in her poetic career and life. Her blissful married life provided her a lot of inspiration to write love poetry. She became one of the first to write poetry of married love in Orissa. We find this love depicted vividly in the poems of *Jhara Shiuli* (1951) and *Swapnadeepa* (1953).

Another important theme of her poetry was her loving concern for children found in her poems written for children. She started writing these poems after the birth of her first child and continued off and on in her career.

The last important aspect was a subtle spiritual element which was always present in her poetry, at times in distinct shapes, at times as a part of her poems dealing with nature and family affairs and finally as clear expressions of her strong devotion to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

She had also other emotions and concerns such as love, family relationships of joy and happiness and sorrow in day-to-day life and concern for humanity at large. The language she used was simple and natural and it had the potential to give vent to her powerful feelings in musical verses.

Bidyut Prabha possessed a strong organic sensibility and had great enthusiasm for life and tenderness of heart. She had very good knowledge of human nature and a soul that could comprehend the nuances and subtleties of life. With her comprehending soul and organic sensibility she reacted to experiences in such a way that ordinary experiences were transformed into beautiful art emotions that resulted in good and effective poetry, a poetry of high order.

The poet loved nature and skillfully portrayed her beauty. Many modern poets have written about nature. They have turned to her for peace, solace and comfort. To some poets nature has seemed attractive because the beloved is coming to meet the lover at a rendezvous. Sometimes nature has felt good and looked beautiful because it belongs to the poet's own land, his village, province or country. In such cases there is no real rapport, no identification with nature. In Bidyut Prabha's case one notices a rare intimacy, a close association and involvement with nature. Therefore she can see the essential beauty of nature and depict her as a responsive living being:

When you come
Scattering pearls of dew
Covering mountain-peaks
With veils of mist
The forest murmurs
With the falling of leaves
The birds gather

In the golden cornfields.
When you stride across fields
Painted with the golden hue
Of mustard blossoms
Winter, the sick, old woman
Trembles with cold
And the boatman rows his boat
On the quiet waters
Of the river.

('Saswati', *Bihayasi, BPG,* Part I, pp. 215-216)

Bidyut Prabha looked at the whole world with the eyes of a poet. She reached out to the world with love. To her various forms and shapes, colours, sounds and perfumes of the world were not ephemeral. Her heart flowed into them. Her love was genuine so also her tears. Her emotions and feelings were always powerful and they shone through her poetry.

The poet dealt with various socio-political issues as a litterateur and not as one involved in propagating one's ideological beliefs and convictions. She was a humanist rather than a propagandist, a humanist who wanted people to live happily. She protested against inequality in different spheres of life and opposed the social system that perpetuates class-consciousness. That the rich treat the poor as objects of pity and shirk their duty and responsibility for them was anathema for her. That is why she exposes the mindset of the rich in the poem 'Rickshawalla'. Those people think that they have no responsibility for the suffering of the poor:

Are we responsible for that?
Give him an anna
Let him go.

('Rickshawalla', *Bandanika, BPG*, Part I, p.244)

Bidyut Prabha wanted to see the world as more beautiful than it is now. She also wanted man to grow and achieve perfection. For that he must purify himself and develop spiritual consciousness. For her God was not an entity ruling over the world from outside, from heaven. He is flexible, loving and ever willing to bestow His love and affection on man. Such a realization had gradually lifted her mind towards God. While singing His glory she felt His presence in her life and surrendered herself completely before Him. During the last part of her life her

mind completely turned to God and the two great Yogis, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and she followed the path of integral Yoga. She developed the conviction that God will take care of His world and she has just to work for God as a dedicated soul. She would only love and accept whatever would come on her way.

As a poet Bidyut Prabha drew sustenance from nature and from both the socio-cultural and psycho-spiritual world untouched by modern sordidness, competitiveness, uncertainties, anxieties, loneliness, alienation, despair and disillusionment. For all the disappointments and sufferings in her personal life, the image that dominates the mind of her literary critic and biographer is one of a serene, sedate, optimistic, sympathetic personality dreaming of a world full of beauty, charm, understanding and love. Her humanism speaks through her poetry, a humanism that emphasized the dignity of man and his perfectibility and considered this world as a legitimate object of interest and love. It stressed the education of both men and women and held that the goal of education is to create a complete human being with all his / her capabilities fully developed and hopes fulfilled. It is an education, which put emphasis on physical training as well as mental training and teaching by reason and gentleness rather than by authority and brutality.

Bidyut Prabha talked from within the tradition bound society and for such a society that believed in customs, ceremony and traditional values. As a writer she followed the common tradition of Oriya literature although, at times, she criticized the several drawbacks of the existing social order, and expressed her belief in evolutionary changes. This relatedness to the continuing tradition and to the evolving society makes her different from many of her contemporary writers who experienced a sense of alienation and aloofness from society.

Bidyut Prabha's principal title to fame rests upon her poetry. Apart from her poems she had written only a lone novel and a single One-Act play. Her poems are memorable and have a permanent place in Oriya literature. But when one assesses her poetry and locates it in the whole tradition one desists from according the title of greatness despite its ability to charm the reader. As a poet she can hardly match Radhanath, Madhusudan, Nandakishore, Gangadhara, Mansingh, Rautroy, Gadanayak and a

host of others. All the same she wrote prolifically and wrote well, giving moving expression to a variety of moods and sentiments and commanded a large readership. Each of her poems is pleasant to read, pleasing to hear and very much moving. The lucidity of her expression is extraordinary. Considering the authenticity and appeal of the varied emotions and sentiments she presented and the competence she demonstrated in the use of verse forms and poetic language, she càn certainly be described as a very effective and successful poet. But much of her poetry is lacking in complexity, concentration, contemplation and modern ideas. Though she didn't achieve greatness she achieved celebrity-status in Oriya poetry. This 'literary domestic' in her very simple and unassuming way demonstrated how an ordinary life lived in common place but beautiful environs can be a source of writing good poetry and nourish one's vision and humanity. Bidyut Prabha had true poetic inspiration. She had the instinctive urge to write poetry about her own inner world as well as the outside world.

Strictly in terms of originality of talent Bidyut Prabha did have something unique about her. As a painter of rural nature and country life she was unique in Oriya poetry. The fullness of love, the keenness of observation, sensuous apprehension, intimate understanding, insightfulness and profound sympathy that characterize her poetry are very rare in the poetry of other Oriya writers. She offered a tender, intimate, comprehensive experience of village life in poems that are valuable for their lyricism and sociological perception.

Bidyut Prabha never went in search of critics and admirers but rather chose to silently worship the Muse. She had a kind of social spirit, personal ethics and literary faith, which is rarely seen, in the modern world. Her activities were always tempered with humility. She was not merely a poet; she was much more than that. She had several accomplishments; she was related to several things. She was not an ordinary woman belonging to the 'second sex', enjoying little and internalizing patriarchal ideologies. She could prove that a person can have a strong identity of one's own irrespective of being a male or a female.

She played the roles of a daughter, a wife, a mother and a housewife like other women but she transcended all those identities. She lived in this world leading an intense life but she was not attached to this life. Her mind and heart were always

moving in a higher plane, much higher than the plane of this selfish, mundane world. Her life and literature were inseparable from each other and from the world she lived in. Her life and works show how a good and sensitive heart, when creatively inclined, could be the cause of some of the finest poetry in Oriya literature.

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Appendix I

The Problem of Women
Bidyut Prabha Devi

Woman is an embodiment of energy. As a part of Divine Energy she is the mother. Man is powerless without woman. The pleasant union of man and woman leads to the healthy development of the world. Man and woman are the parts of *Purusha* and *Prakruti*. The progress of the world depends on the asceticism, ideal character and right conduct of women. The glory of chastity, the strength of character and the wealth of motherhood are the best adornments of a woman. Nowadays an unreasonable competition between man and woman is noticeable in society. When I ponder over this issue, a nice short tale comes to my mind. Once upon a time a lion and a lioness were passing through a city. They saw on a wall the portrait of a man sitting on a lion. On being asked about it by the lioness, the lion said if he had painted the portrait he would have made a lion to sit on a human being. For a long time, men have exercised their supremacy in society and dominated women. The male centred social order is a figment of man's imagination like that of the portrait in which man sits on a lion.

According to Tantras the Creator doesn't belong to any gender. He is called the Supreme Intelligence or the Supreme Consciousness. For the divine sport (*Leela*) this Consciousness is manifested in forms such as *Shiva* and *Shakti* as well as *Purusha* and *Prakruti*. If we don't concentrate on the outward appearance of a man or a woman and think deeply we will realize that both are parts of the original divine consciousness and have been created with similar potentialities for the divine sport of the Creator. The conflicts between men and women will decrease when they become aware of this. But both man and woman will be really independent when they are free from mutual dependence and slavery. They will continue to be slaves of each other as long as they are not free from the shackles of desire. In such circumstances the question of a man dominating a woman or vice versa doesn't arise.

In this context the words of the Mother are quite relevant.The Mother has said that women cannot be free from the fetters and become independent through any rule or regulation. They are tied with the rope of slavery due to the following reasons :

1) A woman's attraction for a man and his abilities.

2) The desire to lead a domestic life and to enjoy the safety it provides.

3) Longing for motherhood.

Only when women are free from these desires and weaknesses they can be equal with men.

In the past, affectionate mothers and sisters had great patience and they flooded ordinary domestic life with love. We come in intimate contact with many great women when we read the history and *Puranas* of ancient India. The faith, dedication and religious beliefs of these women had entered into the very being of simple, innocent, pure and noble-hearted girls and those were parts of the cultural ethos of society. At that time, when a young girl of good character and breeding was going to another family after marriage, the condition of the whole family was undergoing a great change.

Religion, at that time, was based on the emulation of the good conduct and morality of great men. Today, with the growth of rationality, religion has collapsed under the impact of reasoning. As the religious belief of women has declined the sorrows and miseries are increasing in society day by day in spite of the material development. Both scientific and material developments have failed to make man happy. Sorrows, lack of peace, fear, disbelief, untruth, oppression and violence have become the order of the day.

The word 'woman' brings before us the dual image of women. One image is that of a modern, civilized and well-educated woman equal to man and the other is that of a neglected, oppressed and insignificant woman resembling an old, abandoned broomstick, who leads a pathetic life full of despair. When we see these two images of women and contrast them, we feel a woman's life doesn't have much meaning in God's creation.

Responding to the criticism of common men and treating it as his duty towards the state Rama, in the *Ramayan*, had wanted to test the chastity and greatness of his wife, Seeta. But truth cannot be tested magically within a moment. Such testing is an insult to truth. It so happens that the mental perversion of a few people

brings dishonour on truth. In this case, Rama had to lose his wife, Seeta because of the dishonour meted out to her.

In this age similar acts of folly are being committed. People do things, which others think to be good by sacrificing their own personality and principles. It is true that women have progressed a lot with the evolutionary changes of the world. But bad education instead of good education, and license and willfulness in the name of freedom have become their best adornments in social life. Majority of woman are acting as cooks and childbearing machines and by that they are making their otherwise blissful married life dismal and joyless. Women forget that they have the power to resist the unjust, sinful and antisocial trends prevailing in the present society.

Home is the school of life where the woman plays a pivotal role. This school imparts the best education and moulds character. In this school of life a woman can play the roles of the teacher, mother, sister, daughter and daughter-in-law. By playing these roles effectively she can give new light to the human society. That is why the future world has become completely dependent on her. When the woman will be courageous and powerful and do her duties well the present world, torn by anxiety, violence and grief, will be converted into an abode of permanent peace. Then the eternal ideal of truth would blossom in the inner consciousness of the people. Consequently, not only the problem of women but all the problems of the entire world will be solved. Now it is time for women to take steps courageously to achieve the ends.

Mahashakati, the Divine Energy creates the sweet and beautiful environment of nature with the mild touch of her hand. We are charmed and overwhelmed by the leaves in the trees, flowers on their stalks, waves in the sea and the sweet murmuring sound of water flowing in the streams. If woman rises above narrow selfish interests, overcomes arrogance and frees herself from slavery and becomes conscious that she is a part of Savitri, the invisible Divine Energy and the goddess of creation, an environment of progress will automatically be created in the family, society, and nation and in all other fields.

(This is an English version of the text of the radio talk of Bidyut Prabha Devi broadcast by All India Radio, Cuttack at 1.10.p.m. on 9th January 1972. The same has been translated from the Oriya by the author.)

Appendix II

In a commemorative volume written to pay tributes to Bidyut Prabha after her death, Panchanan Mohanty, her husband had made the following observations on Bidyut Prabha's personality:

> The poet was a *Kinnari* (a mythological demi-goddess who sings in Heaven) who happened to be under a curse. She had justified her name, Bidyut Prabha (The Flash of Lightning) by appearing on a stormy day and disappearing at the small hours before dawn. Within the short span of her life she saw and wrote as much as was possible. When the time for release from the effects of the curse came she went away breaking the attachment for her fellow traveller. She had played her role consciously on the world stage. So when she departed, her acting didn't have any impact on her. A liberated and great soul doesn't crawl to live. To live somehow by crawling is only a delusion. When a soul doesn't find any possibility for its development in the world it goes away. The deluded husband, wife, father and the son cry out of ignorance. There is a wise saying that one should leave the world to save one's soul (*Atmarthe Pruthibim Tyajet*).
>
> (See Mohanty, Binapani et al. Ed. *Kavi Bidyut Prabha*. Bhubaneswar: Bidyut Prabha Smaranika Committee, 1978, pp. 52-53)

In the same book Panchanan Mohanty has mentioned about a poem which, Bidyut Prabha, his wife had written for him and which he read when he was alone. We give below the English translation of the Oriya poem, which does not bear a title.

You and I were birds
In a previous life
We had built our nest
On an old banyan tree
In a charming hamlet.

In our rocking nest
Puttting one beak on the other
We were dreaming with joy
In a drowse.

One new moon day
When the cruel storm blew in the sky
And our nest broke into pieces
You were startled
You turned to me, my dear
And cried out for help
The storm was still blowing
I called you repeatedly
Wailing with grief
And shedding tears
Unable to hear me
You were lost in the dark
That night we bade farewell
To the life of a bird.

Some other day
We were born again
Taking the form of water lilies
To enjoy the love
Of previous life
To our hearts content.

We lived in a quiet pond
Free from the fear of the storm
The mild wind swung us
And made us close
We could hear
What one spoke to the other.

In the beautiful, silvery night
Of the month of Bhadrab
Under the canopy of moonlight
We, the two water lilies
Looking like two pictures
Smiled on the waters of the pond.

One fine morning
A young married woman of the village
Broke our drowsiness
With the touch of her delicate hand

And took us to offer
At the feet of the deity.

Indulging in the luxury
Of our own beauty
On the doorsill of the mud-hut
We glanced at each other
And intertwined ourselves
With swollen chests.

When the evening-maiden
Put her slow steps on earth
Pouring red hue in the sky
We were fading fast
Like the feeble flame
About to die.

Since that day
I have not seen
The shadow of your form
Even once in a dream.

Oh, my darling!
Won't we be united in the future life?

(Ibid. pp. 53-54)

Bidyut Prabha Devi was both a talented and a popular woman poet of modern Orissa. The most powerful and dominating aspect of her poetry was her sensitivity to the beauties of rural nature as well as rural habits, manners and festivities. As a love-poet she was one of the first to write the poetry of married love. When she grew older she wrote spiritual and devotional poems and poems for children. The language she used was simple and natural and it had the potential to give vent to her powerful feelings in musical verses. The most remarkable features of her poetry are her deep humanistic gesture and feminine grace. Her life and works show how a good, sensitive and creative spirit could be the cause of some of the finest poetry in Oriya literautre.

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